LACUNA

MATURE AUDIENCES
ISSUE #4
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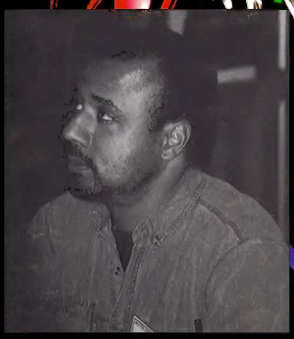
NANCY COLLINS
Vampire author talks behind the scenes

Elaine Lee
VAMPS WRITER
TALKS ABOUT NEW SERIES

HART FISHER
Horror for murdering fiends

KIRK LINDO
Vamperotica creator:
Are vampires real?



VAMPIRE fiction by today's hot, new talent!

KIRK LINDO
JASON MOORE
1995

Yeah, right...

When Kirk Lindo agreed to an interview for our "Sexy Vampire Issue," I expected a little of his time, a few pieces of art and a stack of *LACUNAE #4* on his doorstep soon after release. What I got was thorough support from a very busy man.

I hooked up with Kirk at the Heroes Con in Charlotte, NC, after a brief phone call, with this vampire guru telling me, "Yeah, we'll hook up Saturday night. Just tell me when you can meet and I'll schedule everything else around you." But when I showed up at the hotel for a planned dinner with Kirk and his wife, Michele, I was crushed... I remember clearly waiting in the bar, telling Joe Pruett {*Negative Burn*}, Larry {*Bulldog Productions*} and Mayfield that Kirk Lindo had stood me up. "I can't believe he stood me up!!"

Granted, Kirk is a much bigger name than I and they do say patience builds character, but hey, my high school days are over. If a guy stands me up, there'd better be a police report or hospital record to back him up!

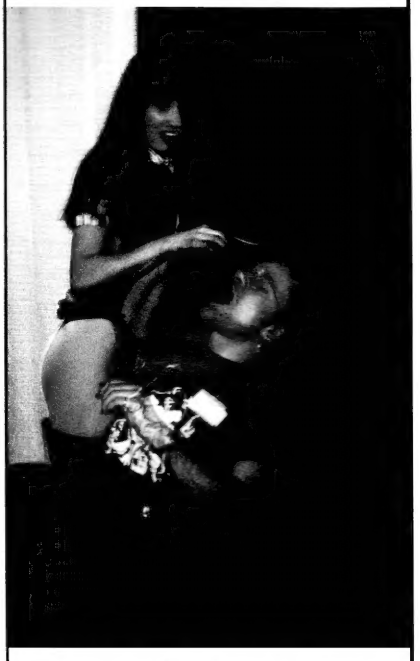
About two hours and 3 or 4 or 5 Gin & Tonics later, in walks Billy Tucci, and from just beyond, Kirk, apologetic as ever. "Yeah, well I haven't eaten yet because you said we'd do this thing over dinner," I told him, laughing. Thus, Kirk Lindo bought me dinner in one of the finest hotels in the Charlotte area. We did the interview, had a drink or two and the rest is history...after you read it.

What started out as a simply outlined issue, grew into an array of every kind of art, fiction and poetry you can think of. Sad thing is, it's not all here. Within the preview and first four issues, LACUNAE has grown from 24 pages, to 32 pages, to 40 and 48 pages, I don't know where to stop. We literally ran out of room. So, you can look forward to more of the same, including vampire book & comic reviews, etc., in the next issue, plus special opportunities to take some of this stuff home with ya.

Now before you flip through every page, throw this mag down on the coffee table, screaming that you can't find the interview with GWAR, I'll ruin it for you now. There is none. But since GWAR was in the solicitation, I'll cover my butt by printing here the only direct quote I can remember Huntar Jackson said when we were talking about the interview in the first place. "Slave Pit is incorporated."

There you have it, folks!

FEED ME...



Boneyard Press Publisher Hart D. Fisher's dream comes true at the Motor City Comic Con in March 1995. After attending the pro suite at the convention, and seeing the new *Vampirella* spokes model, Hart said, "I want Vampi to sit me down and feed me grapes."

LACUNAE #4
Sexy Vampire Issue
October/November 1995

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THE CAST

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ACT XI
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RANTINGS & OBSERVATIONS

by Maya Pynions

Am I the only one who went out and purchased the Alanis Morissette CD just to hear if she actually did use the word *Fuck* in **You Oughta Know**?

Didn't think so.

And it sounds so good when she says it, too...

I don't care how many millions of people are buying Windows 95, I'm in no rush to stick that baby into my system just yet. A couple of guys doing *thousands of hours of comprehensive testing* just can't compete with the several **million** who are field-testing Microsoft's latest {*2-years latest, actually*} software megarelease. I don't like the idea of being just one in that sea of guinea pigs. There's something inherently unsettling about calling tech support and hearing, Uh.... instead of instant answers to my tiniest problem.

Besides, any time I see a product at Computer City entitled ***Rescue Kit*** for... anything, I get jittery.

Note: to **Bill Gates** - feel flattered, that was supposed to be you in the movie **The Net**.

But any chance to get to be near **Sandra Bullock** is worth being portrayed as a greedy, criminal, corporate overlord willing to do anything to anybody to get what they want.

Relax - the movie was **fiction**. Or supposed to be...

Speaking of Sandra - doesn't she remind you of the cute girl next door everybody wanted to take to the prom?

Then take out to a motel afterwards and do things **Ron Jeremy** would find outrageous?

Thought so...

Nobody, but nobody, who paid to see the much anticipated **Mike Tyson** comeback bout between the just-released convicted rapist and completely unknown and overmatched **Peter McNeely**, has any right to complain about what they got. If I take a ripe stinkin' turd and wrap it in shiny gold leaf, it's still shit when you get down to it, and there's usually no mistaking shit when somebody sticks it in front of you. How Don King got anybody to spend a buck, much less $40 to $50, is beyond me.

But God, I do wish I was a heavyweight sometimes...

Memo: to the head of development at **Universal Studios** - next time somebody pitches an offer to make a film starring two action stars and a comedian with an ethnic bent, please go watch **Lethal Weapon 2** before **La Cage Aux Folles**, okay?

Note: To **Patrick Swayze**, **Wesley Snipes**, and **John Leguizamo** - *what the hell were you thinking?* If somebody even *suggested* a movie with a title so cryptic, where big name stars would be forced to do drag-gags yet play their characters straight up, I'd think I was working with **Troma**.

Word of advice to **Spike Lee** - that goofy floating camera trick wherein the viewer feels like he/she is floating towards the character on screen while the backgrounds don't move - is getting tired. Once every few films or so its interesting, in **Clockers** it's downright distracting. A **Sam Raimi** film might be able to get away with overutilization of a single camera trick. Emotional dramas about the urban ghetto cannot. Watch a succession of **John Woo** films and you'll find that while there are a lot of similar angles, etc., used in each, at least he rotates his repertoire.

I thought Spike was gonna let a white character get away without using the word **nigger**, but no chance. Even **Harvey Keitel** breaks down near the conclusion and spits it bitterly into the face of a genuinely sympathetic **Lee** criminal. Maybe next time...

Memo to **Lee** and heavyhanded counterpart **Oliver Stone** - any chance of directing a movie without a sledgehammer to drive home points? Please see **Hitchcock** for a quick lesson on balancing the overwhelming with the subtle please, soon, I understand you both have projects in the works.

I wanted to like **Waterworld** I really did.

But I can't see where they spent eighty thousand dollars on effects, etc., much less eighty million. I was even disappointed with usual fave **Dennis Hopper**. I should've just watched **Mad Max**, but on Laserdisc if I wanted to feel the expense...

Somewhere, I know somebody caught on tape the wonderful moment shared between **Christopher Walken** and **Dennis Rodman** on the MTV Music Awards. If ever there was a genuine moment when even **Dennis Miller** could have been rendered speechless...

Why is it that every time I see **Jesse Jackson** on TV and hes asked about **Colin Powell**, he looks like Nixon when they asked him about his tape collection...?

Could it be that **Colin Powell** can say to voters, "*I've had a job...*"

Any republican "candidate" who thinks they're getting in the way of **Dole for President** should go talk to **Michael Dukakis**, **Dan Quayle**, and/or **Gerry Ferraro** and **Walter Mondale** - if they don't hear **Talia Shire** screaming "*You cant Win!*" as their sound bite, they're deaf *and* dumb...

Lastly, Note: to **Cal Ripken**. Wow.

'Til next time...

In less than three years he's jumped into the cutting edge of independent comics with his creator-owned, self-published title *Vamperotica*, which inspired the spinoff *Luxura*.

His attention to detail is well-noticed, and he's proven his skill in being not only a creator, but also a publisher of several pros and newcomers to the comics arena. He is...

Kirk Lindo

"That psycho hair dude."

artwork © 1995 Kirk Lindo

PH: *You started Brainstorm Comics yourself?*

KL: Not by myself. I had a great deal of help from my wife, Michele, my friend, Scott Harrison, and a few other people. I get a lot of help at conventions from friends Paul Schleicher and Gus Pabon. The company started in 1992, but we didn't publish our first comics until March 1993 - *Intrazone* and *Sweet Lucy*, both by Harrison.

PH: *So you spent quite a bit of time getting prepared for it, you just didn't jump right into it?*

KL: I used to work for another comic book company, which was probably one of the best things to happen to me. I got to see all the things they did that didn't work and all the things that did work. I was able to get an insider's look at the industry before going on my own.

PH: *What company was that?*

KL: Personality Comics, which I hate to admit I worked for. They started off producing a basically good product, but after awhile failed to realize the value of quality. They were caught up in the way the comic market goes, which is, first you solicit, then wait for your orders. They realized that technically the quality of your books before your orders doesn't make a big difference if you can tell the retailers, "Hey, this is gonna be great." This is back in '91 and '92 when a lot of publishers solicited comic books with just a cover. They never really showed the interiors. A lot of people got away with a lot until the distributors just closed it down.

PH: *Are a lot of independent publishers now suffering because of that? Because now they're having to show everything in order to get picked up?*

KL: It should have been that way from the beginning. At Brainstorm we pre-produce comic books. We get the writing, artwork, everything ready to roll, then we solicit. I look at it the same way movies are made in Hollywood. They don't advertise until it's made, all the final editing is done. Then they sell it. Think about it, if you're not concerned about selling something right now then all of your concentration is going to be on, "Well I'm going

interview by Pamela Hazelton

to have to make this good enough because when it gets out there I want it to sell," instead of just trying to ship a book before your deadline is out. There are a lot more quality books out there now.

PH: *You got "hot" really fast.*

KL: I don't really think we're "hot." And it depends on what you call fast. Brainstorm itself didn't get hot, *Vamperotica* started off with relatively good sales for the first issue, about 6,000 copies. I thought it was good for an independent black and white. That was in December of '93...it was the big glut. It was something I wanted to do for a long time because I'm a big vampire fan. I love the genre and the types of stories it lends itself to. I think we just touched a nerve that people were ignoring. The only other real vampire book around was *Vampirella*, and *Vengeance of Vampirella* wasn't published until April '94. They were still sort of rehashing some of the older *Vampirella* stories. We overprinted 2,000 copies of *Vamperotica #1* and sold out at conventions. People came up to our table and just by thumbing through, they liked the title, they liked the work and they bought it. When we did #2 I told the distributors, "I have a book I've been doing pretty well at conventions {with}." Diamond did a little preview that went out to retailers. Capital {City} threw in a 2-page "Read my Book," where you create 2 pages of artwork that say, "why should you read *Vamperotica*?" Our second issue doubled in sales, while we got reorders for another 5,000 of #1. I didn't have any, so I asked the distributors to take a second printing. They said, "Yeah, but we'd have to take it on a returnable basis." None came back. I was sold out again. When #3 came out we solicited a third printing of #1. However it rounds out, *#1* has sold over 30,000 copies. We're about to do a fourth printing.

PH: *What are your numbers now?*

KL: Now we're hovering between 13-15,000. Our sales are very consistent.

PH: *Did you expect it to go this well?*

KL: Not really. I thought it would take 4 or 5 issues to take off. Reading from what everyone else was doing, like Colleen Doran {*A Distant Soil*} or Dave Sim {*Cerebus*}, I expected the first couple of issues to lose money. I was hoping to just sell enough to pay for the print run. I decided, "I'm going to devote a certain amount of issues to this and try to make it work," because I really wanted to do a vampire book. I just was able to fill in a niche. I noticed that after we did our vampire anthology, a few more popped up. Some good ones too.

PH: *Is there a Halloween issue of* Vamperotica*?*

KL: Not this year. Maybe for '96. I love books like *Cerebus* and *Bone*, ones that are very steady, very stable - they're satisfying and entertaining to the readers month after month. That's what I like to do. We do specials, we'll do a swimsuit issue, a lingerie special, we'll do a lot of things, but what I really want to do with *Vamperotica* is make well-written vampire stories. Some people think it's a bad girl book because of the Luxura character, but we have some excellent stories.

PH: *How long have you been working on Luxura's creation?*

KL: There's a similar character I've been sketching for years. Dark One {*Animal Mystic*} came up to me at this convention {Heroes Con, Charlotte, NC} and said, "Oh yeah, Kirk Lindo, that psycho-hair dude!," because of the real elaborate hair I draw for Luxura. I've always been real fascinated with different styles of hair.

PH: *It has to be monotonous drawing that same hair continuously.*

KL: It's not the same hair. There's no two pictures with Luxura's hair the same. The patterns are similar, but each one is a new thing. When I'm drawing it I think of a new pattern. It's a lot of fun because it's designing. Luxura's hair is decorative, it's like art noveau, it's an artistic expression. I'm trying to make a beautiful woman...

PH: *Do you ever get women complaining about the size of Luxura's breasts?*

KL: Not yet. You'd be surprised how many women fans we have, much more than I expected. We get a lot of mail-orders from women in Canada, Australia, Japan, Germany, and all sorts of places.. They say the same thing: it's a beautiful character and they like the way we've handled her. We have a few rules in *Vamperotica* I don't know if people know about. 1) there is absolutely no mindless demeaning of women whatsoever. In many cases, women are central, strong characters. People might look at the book and say it's a female exploitative type thing, but if you ever sit down and read through the stories you'll find the women are usually strong, confident individuals going after what they want. 2) There's no slapping around or beating of women. There's no mindless rape scenes in a dark alley where someone has to come out and save them. Luxura is a beautiful woman in charge of her domain. I've heard guys say, "Make the breasts bigger," but I haven't heard any women say, "Make the breasts smaller."

PH: *Do you think Luxura is a fantasy come true for women? Being that she is in power of herself* and *she's beautiful?*

KL: One of the biggest mistakes is when people think, "When this Bad Girl craze is over..." The Bad Girl thing is not a craze, it's not a fad that's going to disappear in three months. The comic book, film and entertainment industries have had decades of female characters as secondaries. For decades, women have been emerging more and

more as powerful, confident, successful. My favorite movie is Terminator 2. Not for Arnold Schwarzenegger, but for Linda Hamilton. She's awesome in that movie! She's as bad as the Terminator! There's just so many scenes where, here's a woman who... from Terminator to T2 is like the change in women in America. In Terminator she was a weak victim. By T2, she's telling Arnold what to do. She's telling her son what to do. She's breaking out of this insane asylum on her own. She begins to absolutely take charge. What you're seeing is Razor and Lady Death and Luxura, these take-charge females a lot of male customers are beginning to buy into and recognize, and a lot of females are beginning to appreciate. I see more women at conventions now than ever, and I've been going to cons since I was 15.

PH: *Do you think that has something to do with the bad girls?*

KL: Definitely. Bad Girls are not a craze. It's like saying the big-budget action film is a craze. The big-budget action film is an established genre people enjoy - they're buying it for a particular reason. They're calling it Bad Girls because every industry needs a label to put on something. *Lady Death*, *Razor*, *Luxura*, they're more than Bad Girl books. They're a new line of comics that focus on characters other than the big, strong, muscular male heroes. We've had so many years of that. I think a lot of it has to do with the fact that most of the people making these new comics with women as leads are guys in their mid-20's to late 30's, so they're used to seeing women in roles of power. They're used to seeing women as heroes, whether it's in politics, television shows or whatever. It's not like Dad goes out and earns all the money anymore. Mom has a big say in the household these days. I have great respect for my mother and my wife. I have a lot of respect for a lot of women. When I was in marketing, my boss was a woman. She's the smartest, shrewdest individual I ever met. She taught me how to function in the corporate business world and succeed. She was an awe to behold. I like women who are in charge of making things happen for themselves. I've heard about Colleen Doran for so long. Today I wanted to meet her because she's running her own show. Regardless of what goes on in this industry, Colleen is putting our her own book *her* way. She doesn't take crap from anybody. I'm sorry I don't have a daughter, I only have two sons. {laughs}

PH: *You're a publisher and a self-publisher with the advantage of being familiar with the business aspect before ever entering the industry.*

KL: That's the biggest advantage I've had. I entered publishing with the desire to succeed in an entrepreneurial sense of it. I wasn't extremely confident in my artistic skills but I had confidence about my business head, how to keep my head screwed on right and produce a product. When I was starting, some people wanted to work with me and do a lot of superhero products. Well, I took a good, long look at the marketing aspect of it, what I had to work with, and realized that if I put out superhero comics, I'm competing with DC, Marvel, Image, who all have an infinitely greater amount of resources. I can't compete with them. I knew that as far as independent comics went, if you do put out a good product, an audience will support you. We canceled a lot of comics because of sales. The first Brainstorm comic sold about 600 copies, which at that point some would have said, "OK, that's it. I'm out!" I thought that was great! "OK, 600, that's where I'm starting. How far can I go from here?"

PH: *What if today a new comic only sold 600 in its first week? Would you be satisfied?*

KL: It depends on what it is. We don't just throw stuff out there. If we put out a comic, we have plans for it. If at this point we had a book that sold

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IN THE BEGINNING EVERYTHING WAS ECSTASY.
"THE HUNT" WAS ECSTASY.
"THE SEDUCTION" WAS ECSTASY.
"THE TASTE" WAS ECSTASY.
AND "THE DEATH"...
"...ESPECIALLY "THE DEATH"...
THAT WAS PURE ECSTASY.

TWISTED BLOOD

CO-PLOTTED, LETTERED, AND ILLUSTRATED BY:
JASON MOORE

CO-PLOTTED AND WRITTEN BY:
RANDY ZIMMERMAN

THROUGHOUT THE CENTURIES I FEASTED. IN PEACETIME I WAS SELECTIVE, AND ATE SPARINGLY. THEN I REALIZED THAT THERE WAS ALWAYS A WAR SOMEWHERE.
WARS MADE "THE HUNT" OBSOLETE.
I'D JUST WOUND THEM SO THEY WERE COUNTED AS A WAR STATISTIC.
CHOK
THERE WAS NO NEED FOR "THE SEDUCTION" EITHER, ONLY "THE TASTE" AND "THE DEATH".
I BECAME A GLUTTON.
MODERN TECHNOLOGY ENDED THE WARS FOR ME. THE BOMBS AND KILLING MACHINES SPILLED AND WASTED MOST OF THE BLOOD, WHILE THEIR POISONS TAINTED IT INEDIBLE.
I RETURNED TO "CIVILIZATION", MY HUNGER WAS FOREMOST.
AS WAS MY STUPIDITY.

I STILL REMEMBER HER.
"THE SEDUCTION" WAS MADE WITH A FEW SHEETS OF GREEN PAPER.
"THE TASTE" WAS TAINTED, NOT POISONOUS AS IN THE WARS, BUT DIFFERENT... ...EMPTY.
I WAS SO THIRSTY THAT I DRANK HER ANYWAY.
"THE HUNT" WAS NONEXISTENT. SHE CAME TO ME.
JUST AN EMPTY SMILE ON HER FACE.
WHEN "THE DEATH" CAME THERE WASN'T EVEN A HINT OF FEAR IN HER EYES.
I FELT CHEATED.
I ALSO FELT AS HUNGRY AS I DID BEFORE I DRANK HER. I DISMISSED IT AS BEING CONSUMED BY HER EMPTINESS.
I HAD NO IDEA HOW CORRECT THAT FEELING WAS.

MY BODY SOON TURNED HER EMPTINESS INTO A DISEASE.
A DISEASE WITH NO CURE.
"THE HUNT" SOON BECAME "THE VORACITY".
"THE SEDUCTION" BECAME "THE CATCH".
"THE TASTE" BECAME "THE THIRST".
"THE DEATH" BECAME "THE GLUTTONY".
I SOON REALIZED MY THIRST WAS WITHOUT END. I COULD DRINK CONSTANTLY AND STILL WANT MORE.
I HAD BECOME A MONSTER.
I HATED WHAT I HAD BECOME.
IN THE BEGINNING EVERYTHING WAS ECSTASY, NOW IT WAS ALL TWISTED.
EVERYTHING WAS A CURSE.

A CURSE THAT I MUST BE FREE OF.
I KNOW "THE DEATH" WILL RETURN ME TO ECSTASY.
I WELCOME IT!
PLEASE FORGIVE ME.

V

END.

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Stolen Moments

by Kimberly D. Mark

Here I am again. Sitting in my car and patiently waiting. I know he will come. I can feel it. He is ready to play again and he never has to ask me twice. I am always ready. The passion between us is so intense I could never say no. Our short stolen moments here and there is all I have and I've learned to accept that. I am always wanting more but our time together is up to him. He decides and controls.

Footsteps now on the roof of my car and my heart starts beating faster. Precious blood pounding hard and fast in my veins. The passenger door opens and he is suddenly next to me. "Good evening, Seth."

I am so nervous I cannot verbally return his greeting. Instead, my hand finds his face. Shivers take over my body as I stroke his skin. Always so soft. Never a five o'clock shadow to ruin the feel.

"I have missed you, Seth. Have you been thinking of me?"

I love to hear him say things like that. He could have anyone, but he chooses me and I still do not understand why. It puts me at such disbelief. The thought, however, does not linger long for he is here now and that is all that matters.

"Of course I have missed you. I think about you constantly." Gently he takes my hand and removes it from my face. His cold lips kiss my wrist as he licks at my salty skin.

"I won't keep you long tonight, Seth," his words ring in my ears. "I'm taking a little vacation and I must leave soon while the night is young." They are words I do not want to hear but I cannot argue. It is always this way. I try to keep him as long as I can but there is always an excuse as to why he must leave.

"So, when am I going to see you again?" My breathing is staggered.

He slowly shakes his head at my question and smiles. "Seth, if you have learned anything from me at all I would hope it would be that patience is everything. Patience is passion." He is right, but still, I must wonder.

He is kissing my wrist again and my blood pumps harder still. Sharp teeth break through skin and the passion builds. My very being is flowing into him. I want him to take me completely. It never happens. These little encounters are tearing me apart. I want more! I tell him this and he stops sucking. My wrist is pounding and I can still feel where his mouth was upon me.

With a slice from his nail, he opens his skin for me... It is intoxicating and lures my lips to him.

"You know that can never happen," he says. "It is much too dangerous."

He kisses at the droplets of blood that have continued to drip out of my wound. My blood is boiling from the passion and, as well, out of anger. I want to be with him. To be truly satisfied by him. I am always just out of reach. To constantly feel the arousal from his touch alone drives me insane. My anger only makes me want him more and he knows it. I can never hide anything from him.

He slowly unbuttons his shirt and strokes his smooth, powerful chest. My own chest is heaving as I fight to control my breathing. With a slice from his nail, he opens his skin for me. I watch for a moment the blood glistening down his chest. It is intoxicating and lures my lips to him. All thoughts disappear from my mind as I concentrate on him alone. Again, I feel the passion that this moment always brings me. It is so unlike being with a woman, though it is erotic, exciting.

He moans as I feed from him. Knowing I am pleasing him pleases me. I want to serve him and be more than just his play thing - some sort of appetizer for the feast his night will bring him. He gently lifts my head away from him and I moan in protest. "Please, just a little more..."

He says nothing. His hold on my head is his answer.

I cannot move. I only take deep breaths and sigh as my passion starts to fade. He kisses at the dried blood on my wrist and then his lips find mine. My body stirs. But he pulls away before I can truly enjoy it.

He stares at me intently as he buttons up his shirt. He wants more, too, but he won't satisfy

his hunger with me. He'll find others and take them down completely. As for me, I'll return to my wife and arouse her from sleep so I may release the passion that is pounding inside of me.

We will both return to our own lives and speak of these encounters with no one.

He leaves me now with a promise to contact me upon his return. I am filled with happiness and sadness - longing with anticipation of when I will again have more stolen moments alone with him.

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INFRARED

Vampire Eyes

by Jaime Hill

Knowing eyes glow afire
In the smothering darkness
Unaware of innocence
Uncaring
Perhaps ignorant
Wanting, seeking
The warm blood that
Fulfills his every desire
Needing to hear
The death of a pulsating heart
Dying, in his arms
The ultimate rush
Exhilarating
As it has been for years
Since his vampire eyes
Were born
At the dawn of evil existence

Romeo of the Night

by Julie Lynn Hayes

Gentle Romeo of the night,
Seduce me with your power.
Here beneath the moon's soft light
Has come our finest hour.
Teach me of your vampire ways,
Of joys not of this earth.
Share with me your vampire days,
That lead to night's rebirth.
Bring me close into your heart,
Baptize me in the flow;
With your sweet blood, make me a part
Of all you feel and know.
My fingers revel in the feel
Of your soft, auburn hair,
Cascading o'er me as I kneel
Before you as if in prayer.
Your tender lips upon my throat
Which kiss, then gently bite.
On an ecstatic wave I float
And moan in wild delight.
Take me, take me, take me now;
Let this be our bridal bower.
Moon, the power of love us endow,
Consummated this midnight hour.
Gentle Romeo of the night,
How warm you feel within me.
Committed now to our eternal night,
I'll always have you with me.

GRAFFITI

In the plane
packed tight
shoulder to shoulder
dead
eyes still open
throat a little too dry
five in the morning
dead
no rest
no peace
a long day to walk
to smile
for the fans
the fools
scribble here
scribble there
dead
clock countin' em down
nowhere to hide
from ruthless hour
dead
a wrung out grin
no fear left
no warmth
dead
under the grace of love
lies burned away
in the belly
all dead
in your eyes.

9/95

by
Hart D. Fisher

Open the window
Open the door
Come inside
Open your mouth
I am storm
flash fire eyes
the last sigh of a dying woman
caught in a jar
rising from wet ash
lips pat down your hair
tears
burnt clean
one bite at a time
where you worship
where you die.

7/95

It's always there
sitting in every empty car at the mall
a flicker out of the corner of your eye
next to the fake rubber tree
in front of a cup of coffee growing colder
eyes out of reach
worn out
quiet, crazy
a dead space
a dried up tear
a dull ache
a stirring in the groin
with your name
your address

9/95

*No vampire fiction discussion would be complete without the mention of Nancy Collins. The 1989 recipient of the Bram Stoker Award for her novel, **Sunglasses After Dark**, Nancy's break into the mainstream of books & comics has kept readers wondering what words will flow out of her next.*

horror author Nancy Collins

*Nancy stays pretty busy these days. After her short stint as writer on DC's **Swamp Thing**, the horror author is working on a vampire comic for that publishing company. She's working with Verotik on a 6-issue comic book version of **Sunglasses**, **Walking Wolf** was recently published by Zeising, and she's doing quite a bit of work with White Wolf as well. She has a **Sonia Blue** comic story spotlighted in MoJo Press's **Weird Business**. And, this month, Topps premieres her 3-part miniseries, **Jason vs. Leatherface**.*

Whether inspired by childhood events or the writing of others, Nancy conveys her ideas artistically. She may be an author of the 90s, but a contributor to fadism she certainly is not. She's got a style all her own and a desire to write what she writes well. Whether it's a short story, a novel or a comic, she's bound to suck readers in before they know it, and keep them there for an eternity.

interview by *Mike A. Davis*

MAD: *What inspired you to start writing?*

NC: I've been writing all my life. I can remember drawing little stories at the age of 3. It's kind of hard to say what inspired me. It's just something I've always done. I don't remember a time when I wasn't writing or wanting to write. I guess it's bent chromosomes. That would be the only thing that would really force someone to write, I think.

MAD: *Do you remember the first story that really,* really *affected you?*

NC: It's a toss up. "Flat Stanley" is about a kid who's real rude and slam doors. He slams the door real hard one day and the chiffarobe squashes him flat but doesn't kill him. He can do things; being flat's kinda OK. He can slide himself under the door, fold up and mail himself to his grandmother. It has its drawbacks, like getting caught up in the window shade for a week. Alternately the idea of being squashed flat but still being alive terrified and fascinated me. My mother said I made her read that till she got so sick of it she wouldn't read it anymore.

The other one I can't remember the name of - a Dr. Seuss story in the Starbellied Sneetches collection, I think. It's about a pair of green pants with nobody in them, walking around, everyone's scared of these phantom pants. They want someone to wear them, and chase this kid around. He thinks the pants are evil, but they just want someone to wear them. Apparently I was exposed to that about the same time I saw the original *Invisible Man* where there's a scene where the pants are running down the street by themselves. I was terrified and fascinated by it - just the idea that a pair of pants would be running around, looking for someone to wear them. And there it is on TV! In my mind I had changed it so the pants would chase people and force them to wear them, then kill you because they were too tight or something. I had a dream where the pants chased me into a restroom. I was hiding in a stall. I knew the pants were on the other side waiting for me. {laughs} I had actually rewritten it in my head or through my imperfect child understanding. I was like 3 or 4, almost on the border of being pre-literate, so my understanding of the story was not very clear. So those were two early influences, of course they're both very absurd but grotesque at the same time.

MD: *So you always had a taste for the horrific...*

NC: For the horrific and the absurd. It's just a matter of how absurd it goes from being funny to really hideous to actually being disturbing.

MD: *Do you have any favorite authors who are working now or any stories or novels you love?*

NC: Right now my favorite writers are Flannery O'Connor, William S. Burroughs - not his cut-up stuff, more like *Cities of the Red Night*, *Port of All Saints* and *Naked Lunch*, and some of the autobiographical works like *Junky* and *Queer*. I like Cormac McCarthy's earlier works: *Child of God*, *Blood Meridian* and *Outer Dark*. I've always been a big fan of John Shirley, who basically taught me how to write through the mail. I've always been heavily influenced by Ramsey Campbell. William Kontzwinkle, K.W. Jeter, T.E.D Klein, Dennis Etchison and Charles Grant were big influences in

the 80s when I became interested in doing horror. Originally I was thinking of going into sci-fi, but I don't have the head for science. The issues I wanted to write about were more within the horror/dark fantasy field than sci-fi anyway.

MAD: *They're a little more human.*

NC: Yeah, well people just hop on, "that's not a believable future." *Awww, who cares?* I don't care if it's believable or not. I'm not dealing with that kind of reality. I could expand into metaphor and actually do a great deal more literary type writing as well in the horror field, because it seems to lend itself to traditional literature a lot easier than science fiction.

MAD: *Do you write everyday or only when inspired?*

NC: Depends on what my deadlines are. {laughs} It usually takes me 2-3 days to finish a short story. Comics usually take a couple of days. It takes a lot longer to plot a story than to write it. It may take me weeks to get the plot down, but once I have it, it only takes a couple of days to write. Novels can take a year to 6 weeks, depending on what else is going on. I tend to give myself a little time on novels because I don't like just sitting down and working on something for 3 months straight and not do anything else. I do a lot of short stories and comics mainly just to make ends meet. If I lived just off my novels I'd starve. {laughs}

MAD: *What made you switch to comics?*

NC: I've had a definite interest in comics for over two decades. I always wanted to have a hand in it and it kinda fell in my lap. It paid well and paid fast. I've discovered I can actually support myself as a writer working in comics and have fun with it and not feel like I'm doing crap.

MAD: *There are so many horror writers doing comics: Lansdale, Skip & Spector, Barker, K.W. Jeter, Wayne Allen Sallee. Why do you think there's so many more horror, science fiction and other writers going into comics?*

NC: Sci-fi has always had a hard time branching into comics, mainly because they usually pick the wrong writers. The space opera and the superhero tend to bleed into each other; so it all just kept turning into superheroes. The science fiction element has kinda remained frozen in comics from the Pulp era and hasn't caught up. There's been very little attempt for cyberpunk-type comics. The Marvel 2099 line keeps leaning more towards the old traditional sci-fi road warrior type, without really defining itself. I've written a few things for the 2099 line and I did a *Spider-Man* in Unlimited 2099 #9. I have an original character in the last issue - Cleopatra Jones as a cyborg, Machina Jones. It's probably the closest thing to cyberpunk they're ever gonna have in that universe. It was my tip of the hat to the old 2000 AD comics.

The British have been able to do sci-fi comics a lot better than we have. The Japanese have done some amazing stuff, like *Akira.* So it's more like America has a problem. {laughs} Not science fiction, just America. Actually the alien/predator stuff is pretty good. And *Starstruck* {Elaine Lee, Mike Kaluta} was the closest thing to a really honest-to-god sci-fi series that I really like in America.

MAD: *Are there any comics you keep up with?*

NC: I keep up with *Sandman.* There's so much out there that unless someone recommends it, I rarely go looking for it. I've kept up with Lansdale's *Jonah Hex and Lone Ranger* series and Alan Moore's & Eddie Campbell's *From Hell.* I pick up Campbell's *Bacchus* and *Deadface* stuff. I like *Marshall Law, The Post Brothers,* and *Savage Henry.* I get a big bang out of DC comics, but there's not much I follow on a regular basis because I don't want to run the risk of being contaminated. I tend to lean more toward single issues and collections. If it's a limited series, I usually wait until they collect it. A A lot of stuff is completely beyond my understanding. I don't understand why people get their panties in a wad over it, like *Lady Death, Shi,* and stuff like that.

MAD: *What happened with* Swamp Thing*? A lot of people were griping, "It started out so strong and then it just kind of petered out." Were you rushed off the title? What happened with that?*

NC: The problem with Swamp Thing is there's not a hell of a lot you can do with him. There's no situation he's in you can't solve in a panel. I was more interested in investigating the peripheral character, fleshing him out some, putting some 3-dimensional elements into his marriage and family. I was determined to break away from the omniscient first person narrative *Swamp Thing* had. I figured, "Well we know how he thinks now. We can do something besides that." By this point this guy should be so weird we can't understand him at all. Basically try to make him less of a superhero-type background and put him in a force of nature that differs with regards to the people around him. I wasn't just operating off Alan Moore's motif. I was also going back to the Len Wein/Bernie Wrightson era, when I started reading it, trying to make a synthesis of all this. I really didn't want to do a second year, but I needed the money. And I couldn't think of anything to do with him for a third year, except to completely destroy the DC Universe! They'd originally said, "We want you to end the second year with just Swamp Thing and no supporting cast."

MAD: *So that was an editorial decision?*

NC: To clear the board. They said I can kill Abby and the baby. I was kind of appalled by that.

MAD: *They were the best reason for reading the comic...*

NC: Yeah, and I thought, "Everyone's been killed before, so's the baby for that matter, so that really doesn't last." Killing somebody doesn't mean anything in comics. How about if they divorce? I got more angry mail over that than if I'd killed them. It was a bit rushed, but I thought I left on a fairly solid note. I felt justified when Steve Bissette said, "All right, so she finally left him. I was wondering when that was gonna happen! God, no woman on earth would put up with that crap!" He's right. If my man disappeared for months on end I wouldn't be putting up with it much. So I tried to use more realism and develop the child into something more than a superbaby they can stick in the crotch of a tree and leave. I wanted to give a sense of place with the Louisiana swamp and the kind of people I knew who lived in Louisiana. If real, Swamp Thing, would be hanging out with people who weren't the mainstream. He would hang out with "green" activists, weird hippies and Deadheads. His friends *would* be gay. I mean, if you're a human/vegetable marriage, you're definitely in the alternative relationship category. A lot of people sniped about it. I reread my whole run and felt like, "Hey, I did a good job. I've nothing to be ashamed of." There were a few things I would have changed a little, but on the whole run, it would've ended this way no matter what. Because after working on my own projects all this time, working on something I didn't own was kinda strange. I wanted to go off and do my own work and that kind of fell through. But now I've got another series that's creator- owned from DC... So I was a victim of the '93 comic collapse.

Killing somebody doesn't mean anything in comics...

MAD: *Would that be what happened to Wick?*

NC: Yeah. Wick got sucked down a hole. She might resurrect some day; a couple companies are interested. I'll have to renegotiate contracts with DC, I'd rather just do it there since they've already paid me for the story.

MAD: *So, don't really look forward to that anytime soon?*

NC: Don't hold your breath. I have a series they're really strong behind because apparently now that *Sandman* is winding down, they're looking for something to tap back into that audience. I'm doing another vampire series for them since *VAMPS* did so well. It's called *Dhampir.* The lead character is a guy who's half human/half vampire. It's all about his travails as a human and later as one of the undead. He's designed to make John Constantine look like a happy guy. I don't have an artist yet. It was originally to be a one-shot, painted graphic novel. Now it's also going to be a monthly line drawn series, with Lou Stathis editing. They're hoping to tap into the apparently bottomless vampire market.

MAD: *What ever happen with Iron Maidens?*

NC: That's now part of an interconnected, 3-part series that will probably never get made. I've got a triptych of superhero teams: one set in depression/WWII, one during Vietnam, one contemporary. They're all vaguely interconnected through blood or personal relationship. *Iron Maidens* is the contemporary one. It was intended to be a female Justice League, like with Wonder Woman, Big Barda, Black Canary, Supergirl, but every time I brought it up to DC, you could just hear the crickets chirping away in the background. It wasn't on anyone's top 10 list unless maybe as an *Elseworlds* series.

MAD: *It's a wonder they didn't snatch that up with the whole "bad-girl, inflate to 10 pounds" kind of thing going on.*

NC: That's one of the reasons why sometimes DC misses out. I had a few original characters tossed in, but no one seems to think that was a good idea. I don't have a name for it. It's this weird dystopian superhero universe. The one character throughout the 50-60 years is crimefighter Joe Danger, who's based on Wildcat. He's not super powered, he's just this guy who beats up people. He's like an old street fighter who wore something that kind of looks like a uniform. He starts off a fairly young roughneck in the Depression. At the end of the series he's America's oldest crime-fighter. He's like the George Burns of superheroes. Whenever they have things at Las Vegas, "Let's hear it for America's most beloved crimefighter... Joe Danger!" They all clap and he comes tottering on with two showgirls supporting him. He dies at 104 by slipping on the soap in the shower. Of course, he had two showgirls in there with him. Smoking cigars, drinking, and he can still beat the crap out of people. His nose has been broken so many times it's all over his face. Joe Danger was a fun part of the project, but I'm not pushing these guys. I may end up using some of the sub plots in an *Unknown Soldier* proposal which has been tossed into the Vertigo bullpen.

The Vampire Edge...

MAD: *What's happening with the* Sunglasses After Dark *comic from Verotik {Glenn Danzig}?*

NC: #1 turned into the ashcan edition. Stan Shaw is the artist. We've had trouble with the contracts and, of course, the stuff with the distributors kinda threw a wrench into the monkeyworks, so to speak. {laughs} Some may say it's part of the "bad girl" thing, but it's not. If you wanted to market it that way, you could, but she's not going to have boobs as big as your head. It's the kind of {story} all the "bad girl" comics *think* they are, but aren't.

MAD: *Is this an adaptation or new material?*

NC: It's an adaptation of the book, though I'm taking some liberties with it because I only have 6 issues to do it in. I'm compressing it, changing things around a bit, making it a little easier to follow. I'm also writing a screenplay, so they kind of parallel each other. If the sales are good on this, we'll adapt *In the Blood* and *Paint It Black*, or we might spin it off into the further adventures of *Sonia Blue*. I'm also waiting to hear back from some movie people.

MAD: *Was the story in* Weird Business *new?*

NC: Yes. Joe Lansdale called me up and said, "Oh, could you do a *Sonia Blue* story?" "*Well, OK, I guess so. How much you paying me?*" "Oh, not enough." "*Oh, cause it's you, Joe, I guess I'll do it.*" It might give people a taste of what the *Sonia Blue* series will be like, except it's not that artist, it's not painted and it doesn't exist as a story. I might get around to writing it as an actual story and sell it to somebody though.

MAD: *Has* Wild Blood *ever come out in the U.S.? It was out in England.*

NC: It came out last August from ROC, as you might not have noticed.

MAD: *There was no press on it , just like* In The Blood *and all the rest.*

NC: Yeah, that was one of the reasons I wanted to get away from them. I had more trouble with them than I should have from a publisher who had actually made money off me. They were completely unwilling to advertise, but ROC is famous for that.

MAD: *Once you were leaving they finally reprinted* In the Blood *and put it on the stands.*

NC: They rushed out a whole bunch of them and resold my world rights while they still could. The day before the rights went back to me they managed to sell them again. There are now British editions of *Tempter*, which I already had rights to - no one seemed to tell them, and *Sunglasses*, to which I haven't ever seen the rights. I left ROC in less than happy circumstances. Why should I be any different from anyone else who's left them?

MAD: *How is it working with White Wolf?*

NC: Much better. They're a young company still learning the ropes to the book business. Since they started off in gaming, they know more about that end of it. But they've got their marketing stuff down tight. They paid me to go on a month-long signing tour. I did 25 cities in 28 days, a major signing blitzkrieg. In the first month we sold over 2/3 of the print run - a pretty good return on the advertising. I'm happy with the way the books look and I'm doing a couple more for them. We'll be splitting the books into paper- backs in '96.

MAD: *Have you tried playing their Vampire role-playing game? What do you think of that whole phenomenon?*

NC: I've got a few of the gaming books, but I've never seen one played. Sounds a lot like improv theater to me. I've never been much into gaming. With all the time and effort involved I can just sit down and write a story, so it's never held much of an interest for me. Especially in the early days when you had to roll all those damn dice. It was just too much like math. {laughs} But a lot of people feel very passionately about it. Sometimes I wonder, when people role-play monsters, what exactly is going through their heads and if they've managed to think it all out. Just like when people role-play superheroes, are they thinking the negative as well as the positive? It's definitely an interesting cultural phenomena.

MAD: *The* World of Darkness *games sound... increasingly familiar.*

NC: Yeah, I noticed that too...

MAD: *Are they paying you royalties, or was the White Wolf deal a part of it?*

NC: I don't know. They claim they weren't aware of my books until recently, but...

I'm doing a *Sonia Blue/World of Darkness* crossover in the 4th volume {Sept. '96}, called *A Dozen Black Roses*, a vampire version of *A Fistful of Dollars*, with Sonia Blue. It's extremely high-energy, high-action, lots of vampires running around, setting fire to stuff. I've designed it so it can be adapted into one of their game modules. I've never read one of the scenarios, so maybe I'm talking through my hat. I've read all the background books about the social and political stuff with the vampires, which is what I'm more interested in anyway. The basic plot involves two warring vampire lords in the same town. Sonia Blue comes in and they're both vying to get her to fight against the other. Basically she's the hired gun and, of course, she's playing both of them against the middle. Things kind of get weird. It's very much a cross between a Sergio Leone, a Dario Argento, and a George Romero movie.

- continued on page 30

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Comin' Soon! Terry "Strangers in Paradise" Moore does Indy 12

Dark Genesis

In the early days of mankind, there lied a broken man, made whole again by a seductress. In time, as history would take it's spin, he would be the beginning of a new breed of creatures.

by
Mitch Hyman

"How tedious...another 'In the beginning.' When will you ever learn?" spoke a voice from the void. It was a fair question. Before it could be answered, the inquirer continued. "Why create these mudballs of yours, when you already know what's going to happen?"

The one to whom the statements cleverly disguised as questions were directed to remained silent.

"No answer? Then truly, you must agree that the inferior beings who will soon walk upon this world will, in all too short order, learn to first respect and then be reviled by you. It's never any different! They will anger you as usual, until you sicken of it, then turn their world and it's volatile elements against them."

Long after, a response came.

"You take much upon yourself to speak to me of such things. Did I not create you, my favored and most powerful aide? If you have no faith in me, then for you, as well as for others who doubt, I shall not exist. The 'inferior beings' you spoke of earlier are to be your children as well. I gave control of the Morning Star to you, and it is this light which is their hope and salvation. You are *their* servant, as well as mine! Now, let us end this pointless argument. You are being foolish."

An angry burst of energy and light filled the void between the two. A voice, more like an explosion, sounded. "So, now I am their servant along with being yours?!! This I will not endure! I have served you well, but that is now ended! Again you seek to blame me for the unspeakable acts these creatures will commit in your name! Well, this time, they will know where the responsibility lies! For once, they will use *your* name to damn themselves! I am strong enough to rebuke you. I will drive you to the dark of their souls. I give you back your so-called 'gift'!! Indeed, darkness will now be my weapon, as it shall be of those who worship me! I would rather rule in Hell..."

The man walked out from the grove of fruit trees where he had spent most of the morning gathering the sustenance he and his mate required. As he walked, he munched upon one of the vermilion prizes of his toils. The juice from it ran satisfyingly down his chin, to land finally on his naked chest. He was content with what this new world provided. Soon he would begin to hunt the furred creatures around him. It was his right as well as his purpose. Hunter and prey were a natural order he would soon embrace. This new life was more difficult than the other, but the ability to adapt was one of the few gifts he and his mate were able to keep. Instinct told him to hurry back to the home he had hewn out of the wilderness. The time was upon his wife.

"Aaaaaggh!! I feel as if I shall be split in twain!" she screamed at her husband. He could do little but wait for the obvious end to her searing pain. Mercifully, it came. Screaming and bemoaning that it had been taken from the warm, dark environment it had grown in. It's father cleansed it, then laid it upon it's mother's breast. Grasping his wife's still trembling hand, he looked lovingly into her eyes.

"It will get easier, beloved, I promise."

She began to sob. "This is all my fault, if I..."

"No! we share the blame. The results of our folly now lies upon you, seeking the love we ourselves lost from on high." He kissed her and whispered in her ear, "He still doth love us. Let this child we shall call 'Cain' be proof of that. He is the first of many miracles." In a shadowed corner of the small shelter, another set of eyes watched the birth, and after seeing all they needed to, slithered off into the night.

The seasons passed as quickly as does a summer squall. The family worked hard at survival. Many new things did they learn. They were becoming masters of the world in which they lived.

The birth of the second son came more quickly and easily for the woman. Soon after, the father left the house he had built, and took his first born, who waited outside due to fear of what his mother was experiencing, by the hand so he could meet his new brother. The father led the boy to his mother's bed, lifted the infant up from his mother's arms, and presented him to Cain.

"This is your brother 'Abel.'

Together you will help tame the wilderness for those who will surely come."

Cain was too young to understand the importance of what his father said. He simply looked at his father and smiled. The infant then glanced at his older brother and began to cry. It was as if the baby knew what the future held. Cain reached with his small, trembling hand to wipe a tear from the babe's eye. He then, for some reason {not even he knew why} placed the finger into his mouth. A look of satisfaction spread across Cain's face. His eyes, however, had a cold, hungry look to them. The boy enjoyed the salty taste, it was a flavor he would not soon forget. A pity Adam didn't notice because another did. The darkness promised years before gathered about them.

At manhood, Cain was given the arduous task of tilling the soil, so that the growing things of the earth would bend to humankind's will. But between the ravages of insects and changes in weather, which Cain could not control, he began to hate his chore. Many was the time he would come home from his labors, and see his brother, Abel, sleeping beneath a tree, while the flocks of animals under his care grazed contentedly. Cain began to despise his brother, whose herds grew fat on the grain Cain's efforts produced. The farmer still believed though that when the day of offering arrived, it would be his efforts that would please he who had no name. It had to be obvious to the creator which one of the two brothers deserved the gift being given this season - the gift of a wife.

Abel lay dead at the feet of his sibling. The day of offering had come, and Cain was enraged over the decision made against him. How could the creator pick that dull-witted shepherd over him? Adam and Eve, in shame and grief, wanted nothing to do with the world's first murderer.

They left him to the justice of G-d. From the heavens above, a familiar, yet terrible voice assailed Cain's ears. "You have taken what is not yours to take! You have, in mine eyes, committed an abomination!"

The voice grew louder. "Take yourself from this place and never find peace again! You will be marked so that all will know, and hate you!"

At once, the ground beneath Cain began to tremble. A large split could now be seen, and from this split in the soil came a great gout of blood - the blood of his slain brother. As the fluid of life rained down upon him, it burned away at Cain's flesh like acid. When the last of it dripped off him, he was changed. He looked human for the most part,

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but his sharpened facial features and elongated hands were portends of things to come. His flesh, once a ruddy color from all the time spent in the sun, had been washed. He stood there, looking sickly pale and insubstantial. This was his mark.

The sky above rumbled again. "Begone, and trouble only yourself...forever!"

For a long time Cain wandered. Since there were no others like him, save his parents, Cain's loneliness and anguish called out to one of an even more corrupt purpose than his own. The nights where he had chosen to endure his banishment were cold and deep.

When the woman approached his meager fire late one evening, he was both shocked and relieved. As he stared up at her, Cain began to wonder if maybe he had travelled far enough away from that G-d's influence, and was now in the territory of another great being.

Her hair was bright as a field of corn near harvest time. Her eyes danced with secret desires Cain was sure she would tell only him. When she sat next to him, on the cold ground, the air grew warm and carried the scent of honeysuckle.

She reached out for his penis, which grew hard and rigid at her touch. Cain's head swirled with pleasure as she drew him between her legs. All this time she had been silent.

Her first words to him carried the weight of doom. "Let us complete what was earlier begun."[2] A sharp sting accompanied her kiss upon his neck. It felt natural, as did all the other things she did to and for him.

When the act was complete, Cain sought to cuddle and embrace his new love. But she wanted no part of it, and told him, "Come now, we must be under cover of some kind when the sun rises. You are not strong enough to survive in it's piercing gaze. Very soon, though, you will be. You will grow strong as you learn to become a hunter, and not the hunted you have been damned to by he who does not want you."

Cain fell to his knees and his stomach began to churn. The discomfort wasn't due to her words, it was due to the changes he was feeling his body go through. As he writhed now upon the ground, he forced himself to ask her who she was.

"I am Lilith. I was to be your mother, but like you, I did not please those who deceptively said they would love me. I was told by he who *truly* loves you to seek you out and help you to your final destiny."

Cain nearly bit his tongue off as the last convulsion hit. The fangs, now fully grown in his mouth, pierced the oral muscle and the taste of what they brought hit him with incredible delight. Strengthened, he got up and walked over to her. "You will be the mother of my children, and they will have revenge on those who worship the light."

Lilith threw her head back and laughed. "I shall have no other offspring save you, my love. The children who shall come from this union shall not come from my cursed womb, but rather from you - he who will be both mother and father of them."

Cain now understood. He reveled in the power that would soon be his. Blood had been his bond and downfall with his first family, in time it would become his and Lilith's salvation. Ironically, it was Cain who would be a shepherd now. His flock, however, would ensure that no human would ever sleep easily again.

So it is written.

ONE NIGHT WHILE WALKING THROUGH THE PARK...

SHOCK & SPANK THE Monkeyboys

in: That Was No Lady, That was a Big Breasted Bloodthirsty Bad Girl!

™

HAVE YOU LOOKED THROUGH A COMICS ORDER FORM LATELY? HOW'RE WE SUPPOSED TO ORDER THIS SHIT? BY PREFERRED CUP SIZE, OR CHOICE OF WEAPONS?

DC WINTER WALLOP PRECHEWS BANG IN THE HALL

KEEP YOUR PARK CLEAN!

YEAH, I KNOW WHAT YOU MEAN! A COUPLE OF YEARS AGO IT WAS ANIMALS, WHAT A FAD THAT WAS, KIND OF LIKE *MILLI VANILLI!*

TOO BAD THERE AREN'T ANY GOOD SUPERHEROES OUT THERE! I USED TO LIKE THOSE!

WHO IS THIS RANDY ZIMMERMAN GUY, ANYWAY? FROM WHAT I HEAR, THERE'S A REASON HE'S SO FRUSTRATED - BLAMES IT ON THE WAR.

SCHMOAR, BABYLON. WE SEEM TO BE IN A COMPETITION BETWEEN PUBLISHERS TO SEE WHO CAN COME UP WITH THE SILLIEST NAME ON THE "BADDEST" "BAD GIRL"

YOU CAN'T READ COMICS ANYMORE WITHOUT TRIPPING OVER THEM!

COMING NEXT MONTH: CHICK FIGHT AND A LEE HOLLIDAY HOOTER!

NOT-SO-ADVANCED COMICS

OOOPSS!!

"SIGH" AS LONG AS THEY CAN DRAIN MONEY FROM THOSE OTHER "ZOMBIE" PUBLISHERS I GUESS... HEY, WHAT'D YOU TRIP OVER?!

NOT AN EDITOR FOR "THE BIG TWO" THAT'S FOR SURE, I THINK IT'S STILL ALIVE!

WELL WHATEVER YOU DO, DON'T PLAY WITH HER, YOU DON'T KNOW WHERE SHE'S BEEN!

COULD THAT BE ONE OF THOSE "BAD GIRLS" WE WERE TALKING ABOUT? MAYBE *RAZOR* OR *SHI*?

SHY? NOT IN THAT COSTUME!

COULD BE *ELEKTRA*, SHE'S BEEN LIMP FOR YEARS! C'MON LET'S GO!

ARRRRGSH! PREPARE TO DIE HAIRY ONES!

WHAT??

HA HA HA

RAINSTORM COM
WRITTEN
&
ILLUSTRATED
BY
KIRK LINDO
WRAP
AROUND
COVER
THE STORM
IS RISING
FULL COLOR · ALL AGE

ICS PROUDLY PRESENTS
THE VAMPRESS
LUXURA
#1
S • SHIPS IN JANUARY

WHY DO YOU LAUGH YOU HAIRY TOADS?!!
WHY CAN'T YOU FIGURE THAT OUT FOR YOURSELF BITCH? JUST LOOK AT YOU!
SHE'S GOT ME SHAKIN' SPANK!
LEAVE THAT ALONE, YOU'LL GO BLIND!
WHAT ARE YOU SUPPOSED TO BE? A VAMPIRE? A DEMON? A CHEAP GRATUITOUS ATTEMPT TO ATTRACT A MALE AUDIENCE?
YOU HAVE TO BE SUPERNATURAL. YOU AREN'T CARRYING A WEAPON!
PROBABLY A VAMPIRE, SHE LOOKS LIKE SHE SUCKS!
SO, WHAT'S YOUR NAME? VAMP? VAMPIRELLA? CINDER? NOCTURNA? NOXEMA? DEMONESS? DEMONICA? SATANIKA? SARAH SATAN? GHOST? GRETA GHASTLY? OR SOMETHING ESOTERIC LIKE THORN? ROSE? BLOODINA? HELLINA? LADY DEATH? HOW ABOUT BOBETTE THE BLOODSUCKER? NAW, DON'T TELL US, I DON'T THINK WE WANT TO KNOW.
I LOVE BOBETTE!
AND TO TOP IT ALL OFF, THIS IS THE 90'S FOR GODSAKES! "HANGING OUT" IN THAT OUT-FIT IS DOWN RIGHT DEMEANING AND SEXIST, RE-ENFORCING A "FEMALE AS SEX OBJECT" ROLE PERPETUATED IN COMICS SINCE IT'S BEGINNING! GET SOME CLOTHES ON!!!
THAT'S MY PAL SPANK ALWAYS OUT TO CATCH A RAVE!
IF THE "MAINSTREAM" DIDN'T HAVE THEIR HEADS UP THEIR BUTT YOU'D BE LAUGHED AT! INSTEAD WE SEEM TO BE TALKIN' ABOUT YOU AS IF YOU WERE "HIGH ART"! YOU'RE LUCKY THE RETAILERS DON'T HAVE ANYTHING ELSE TO SELL! PERSONALLY, I DON'T SEE THE ATTRACTION! WARREN DID THIS MUCH BETTER BACK IN THE SEVENTIES!
YOU DON'T SEE THE ATTRACTION? I SEE A COUPLE OF REASONS RIGHT OFF!
NAW! I'LL BET THEY AREN'T EVEN REAL!
NOOOO!
WATCH!
YAAAAHHHH!!!
POW!
FFFFFFFFFFFFFFFFFFFT!
WOW SPANK, WHAT A GREAT NOISE YOUVE DISCOVERED!
JUST THE SOUND OF HOT AIR BEING LET OUT OF A FAD IS ALL! MAYBE SOMETHING BETTER WILL REPLACE IT!
END
©1993 RANDY ZIMMERMAN. YES FOLKS, HE'S STILL NOT GET'N ENOUGH!!
I DOUBT IT THOUGH! "QUALITY TAKES TIME AND PATIENCE - BREASTS + BLOOD DO NOT.
PAGE 2.

Kirk Lindo—— cont. from page 5

600 copies, I'd have to take a good, hard look at what we were doing and find out, "is this something we're going to be committed to and make grow or is this something we shouldn't commit the resources to?" That would be strictly a business de- cision. There are books I'd love to do. I have sketchbooks where I've done Japanese Manga drawings. I'm not going to publish a Japanese Manga comic because that's not what Brainstorm does, at least not at this juncture. I'm not going to change my entire draw- ing style just because I have the desire to do something. Maybe someday when I have more time I'll do some experimenting.

...my interest in vampires emerged out of a power fantasy. If I could be anything, I'd be a vampire.

PH: *How old were you when you first became fascinated with the vampire?*

KL: I was into vampires in high school.

PH: *What did your mother think?*

KL: She didn't really care. I was a normal kid on the outside. I was into sports. I played basketball, I was on the track team, I used to hang out with my friends and everything. Every once in awhile I'd sit down and draw. I don't think there were really any outward signs to my parents that I was this twisted vampire freak on the inside.

PH: *Does she read your book?*

KL: No, my mother is deeply religious. She knows what I do. She's like, "If that's what you're gonna do, that's what you're gonna do." That was around high school. I got into college and some cool vampire movies came out, like *Fright Night.* When the video stores started carrying more outdated movies, me and my friends used to go in and look for all these weird vampire movies. One of my favorites is *The Lost Patrol*, this group of vampires. They've been around since the Civil War and they keep going to wars so they can feed off the dead bodies. We used to go out and look for all these really bad vampire movies. If there's a really bad one on the shelf, I'll go for it. I love it. All of them. *Vamp*, the one that had Grace Jones, that was a pretty cool one. For some reason, vampires are pretty close in their abilities to Superman. They fly, they have superhuman strength, and they seem to have power over people. I think my interest in vampires emerged out of a power fantasy. If I could be anything, I'd be a vampire. First of all, they've got these cool black clothes on all the time, vampire men are always seducing women really easily, and they're just too cool. The vampire women are always sexy. It's just a cool world. It's fun to look at. It's very passionate and romantic and it's got a lot of atmosphere to it. You can really lose yourself in the vampire.

PH: *Do you believe vampires truly do exist?*

KL: {In low voice} Look into my eyes... What do you see? Little bats flying, right? {laughs} Do I believe that vampires exist? Well, if they do I've never seen any! I know there's people who really suck blood and enjoy the taste. I've met a couple of people who drink blood. They get an X-acto blade, get a friend, and they'll make an incision...

PH: *Now, that's not you, Kirk?*

KL: No, that's not me! {laughs}

PH: *Have you tasted blood?*

KL: Only my own if I bump or cut my finger. It's interesting, I like Superman, but I don't jump off buildings. I think it's cool, it's fun to watch, but there's a difference between entertainment and reality. {If there were vampires} I would be, like, the *cool* vampire. Dress me up like Bela Lugosi and let me walk around saying, "I want to suck your blood!" I get to fly... Ever see that movie *The Lost Boys*? What was the saying in that movie? "Sleep all day, party all night, never grow old, never die." I would be a vampire in a second, are you kidding? It'd be fun, don't you think? {laughs} Maybe I'd end up like the vampires in *Interview with the Vampire* where after they get into this vampire life, they think it's bad.

PH: *A lot of us like to play the vampiristic roles.*

KL: Yeah, the power. The absolute power!!! I wouldn't mind being immortal, seeing what happens in the world 100-200 years from now. I don't think I'd get bored either. I could have the longest running comic series in history! {laughs} If I could keep drawing comics for the next hundred years as a vampire, I'd do it.

PH: *But would you be as hot if people knew there were such things as vampires?*

KL: Sure! Truth can sometimes be stranger and more entertaining than fiction.

PH: *Do you read vampire novels?*

KL: Not as much as I'd like to because the publishing has taken an enormous toll. My average day is 7 a.m. till about 1-2 a.m. because I'm also an artist. I'm drawing a lot of the *Vamperotica* stuff. I also do freelance work for other companies: Chaos!, London Night and a few others. I don't have as much time as I'd like to. The last thing I read was a novel called *Empire of Fear*, which was pretty good. It went from the 1700's to today... Attilla the Hun, Ghengis Khan and King Arthur and the knights of the round table were all vampires. They ran the world. Other than that, stuff I might catch in some magazines.

PH: *So, what else is going on with Luxura?*

KL: Well, her new full-color comic. Since day one people have been saying, "We want to see more Luxura and would like to see her in color." So we took the first four Luxura comics and collected them into *The Luxura Collection* in full color. We also had a pin-up gallery. We had Buzz {*Vampirella*}, Jimmy Palmiotti {*Shi*}, Kevin Taylor, David Mack {*Kabuki*}, Everette Hartsoe, Jim Balent, and a bunch of other people. People really loved it. The next big thing we're going to do is give Luxura her own ongoing comic book - our main push for '96.

PH: That's going to be a lot of work.

KL: I know, but I'm into it. The hair is a little easier to draw now. I've done it so much. Usually when I'm drawing I'll pencil in the figures. When I get to the hair I just pick up my brush and start inking. I don't pencil it. I'll give it a basic light outline of the shape of where I want the hair to go. From there on I just start inking, otherwise it would take me too long.

PH: *Do you always use a brush?*

KL: Yeah. 99% of my inking is with a brush, the rest is done with magic markers, but that's usually only for straight lines or a few backgrounds. 100% of the figures are done with a brush. When I was young, my favorite inker was Joe Sinnott, one of the all-time brush inkers. He inked Jack Kirby, John Buscema, a lot of Marvel titles. I was drawn to the brush because it was much harder to master. I like stuff that presents a challenge. I love the organic feeling that a brush gives. It gives you that softness.

PH: *Did you ever go to art school?*

KL: I went to the School of Visual Arts in Manhattan. I studied under Will Eisner. I was fresh out of college and there were two comic companies in existence, DC and Marvel. I tried to get in but nothing happened. Luckily I majored in marketing and advertising and minored in comics because somewhere in the back of my head I said, "I like to do this but I don't know if I can make a living at it." I knew there were always marketing and advertising jobs to be had. When the comic book market exploded and there were a heckuva lot more publishers, that's when it looked like a good time to go back to what I loved, that I'd been doing since I was a kid.

PH: *So you jumped in at just the right time.*

KL: For awhile I totally was disinterested in comics. *X-Men* and *Spider-Man* just didn't have any interest for me when I was age 21-25. Then the independent market came around and people began making comics that guys who are 21 or 25 would now want to read - that's when I got back into comics. I was starting to dig the stuff. I thought *Elfquest* was great! It was something someone with a little bit of intelligence would have to understand. That's when they started coming out with stuff that was, I don't know if you would call it more intellectual, but definitely not the type of thing that 13-16 year olds were into at the time.

PH: *Do you read a lot of comics today?*

KL: Not a lot. I read a few every week. I always read *Sin City*. I'll read Image comics to see what's going on because Image definitely has their pulse on a particular segment of the market. A lot of the artwork is excellent. Image has had some pretty noticeable writing improvements. You can't say Image comics are poorly written anymore. Some of them are pretty damn good. The coloring is state of the art. These guys revolutionized the industry. I look at a lot of people who bash Image, they don't realize that Image is captivating the younger generation. They're more into *Spawn* and *WildC.A.T.S*, where when I was growing up we were into *X-Men* and *Spider-Man*, which are still doing well.

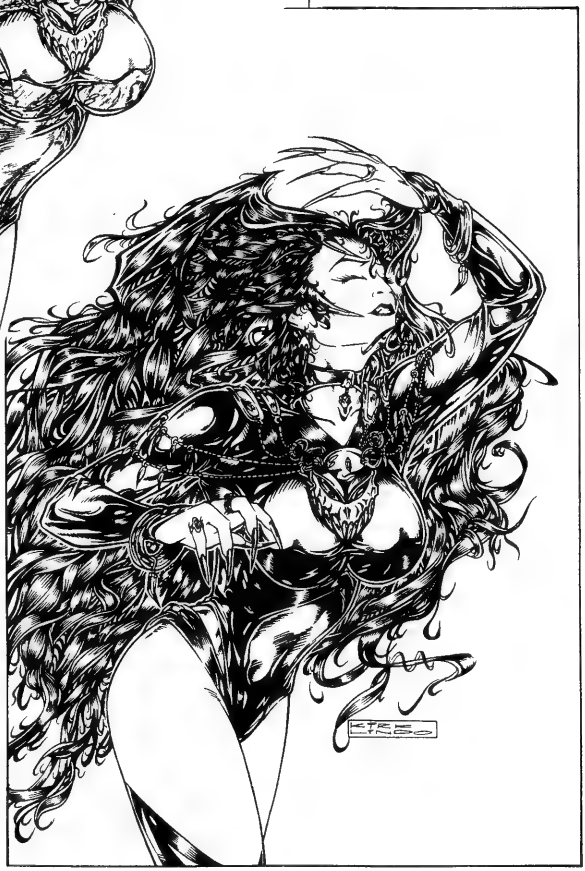
PH: *And* Speed Racer.

KL: ...And *Speed Racer*. He'll probably come back, but a new, darker, grittier Speed Racer. I try to keep in touch and see what's actually going on in comics and what people are doing. It gives me a gauge to see some things I don't like. I pick up 5-10 books a week. I make sure that half of them I definitely like and half I can't stand. I go through and try to figure out why

The Before and After

Finished Pencils

The Finished Product



© Kirk Lindo

I don't like this stuff.

PH: *What are some of the comics you can't stand?*

KL: I'm not going to mention. I look and see what I don't like and make sure I don't go down those same roads.

PH: *Are vampires here to stay?*

KL: They'll be around forever. People love 'em, people will always love 'em. I think their popularity got helped out a lot by Anne Rice's *Interview with the Vampire* movie. There's a lot of vampire fans. One day there will be a vampire channel on TV- running 24-hour a day vampire movies!

PH: *Has the vampire become very modern? Has it become too modern? Or are people relying on a lot of the historical myths of vampires?*

KL: I think right now vampires are an amalgamation of a lot of creative influences. Everybody has their take on vampires. There are things in vampires that from the first vampire novel ever written until now, a lot has been added. I saw a documentary that said the whole cape thing was added when there was some sort of vampire stage show. They put the cape on the character because it looked more flamboyant. There are a whole lot of things that have come in and around the vampire myth that have been thrown in from a lot of people, like ,"How is a vampire made?" or ,"How is a vampire killed?" Some say, "This is how a vampire is," or, "This is how a vampire isn't." The vampires in our book are very different. They're not very thin, they're not very pale, they're not what you would call some of your traditional images because this is *my* take on vampires. This is what *I* like the most about vampires. It's what I've liked over all the movies and books I've read that make vampires cool to me. Some have said my vampire is too voluptuous, her boobs are too big, and the pigment of her skin should be pale. I say, "Listen, one of the main things that I like about vampires is their ability to shape-shift, whether it's into a bat or a wolf." If you have a creature that can change from a human into a wolf, I'm sure the same creature can get themselves from size A to size D in a bra size. I think that would be pretty easy.

PH: *Are your vampires affected by garlic?*

KL: Nah. I'm not into that.

PH: *Can they be killed with a wooden stake?*

KL: Nah, no wooden stakes.

PH: *Do they sleep at night...do they stay inside during the daytime?*

KL: They stay out of sunlight. They're definitely creatures of the night.

PH: *Does Luxura sleep in a coffin?*

KL: Some of the vampires in the story do, but she doesn't. I look at the sleeping in a coffin as a protective measure. If I was a vampire and had to sleep in a coffin I would make sure that coffin locked from the inside so no one could get in and kill me while I slept. But Luxura has what I call is her house, she has a lot of underling vampires that work for her, so she slumbers in her own domain while her Blood Thralls are on guard. The Blood Thralls aren't so much slaves, but more like companions she's taken in under her wing. They're very devoted and dedicated to her because she takes good care of them. She has a maternal instinct over her vampires and they're all extremely loyal to her.

PH: *Do people ever get confused with you at shows thinking you do* Vampirella*?*

KL: All the time. People have sent us letters saying, "I thought your comic was a cheap rip-off of *Vampirella* but after we read it we realized that it was drastically different. I used to be an old *Vampirella* fan and I'm not too in tune to what they're doing now, but I love your Luxura character."

PH: *Where did you come up with that name?*

KL: When I came to one of the final drawings, which was actually a sketch used for the cover of issue #1, I tried to give her a personality..."What is this person's personality? How does she move? How does she operate? How does she think? She's obviously one who appreciates the finer things in life." She's a very luxurious woman. "Luxurious" means something extremely ornamented, something beautiful to behold and when I looked at all these definitions I was like "Yeah, this is the type of thing I really want to say with my artwork. That's something I really want to accomplish." On *The Luxura Collection* she's wearing rings, bracelets, earrings, and chokers. Her costume changes. In the first issues it changes subtly, but later it changes totally. One thing that has always bugged me is...here you have women characters in comics and they wear the same clothes day after day after day. I don't know about you, but I don't know any woman who would wear the same clothes day after day.

PH: *Deep down, when you're drawing the character, do you love her?*

KL: Do I love her?!? No, I don't think I love her, I like the drawings and the artwork, but I don't think I love *her* specifically. If she steps out of the comic books and taps me on the shoulder, then we'll talk. But until that happens, it's just comic books.

PH: *So it's not that you're completely absorbed into your work - you realize that this is something that will be here or not be here tomorrow?*

KL: This is a hobby that grew into a profession. I'm having a good time. I'm extremely fortunate a certain amount of people have appreciated my work. I know there's a lot of people more talented than I am. I just got a fortunate inspiration to create a character people found some sort of common

interest in. I like to think of something in my mind and bring it to life on paper. It's the most amazing thing to be able to explore some of my creative whims. Every once in a while I can purely indulge myself. There's not a lot of professions you can do that in. I try to keep the fun in it as much as possible and not let the business aspects drag me into a whole new world where all I'm trying to do is chase greater sales month after month. I need to enjoy the work. It takes me a long time to think of what to draw, especially when it comes down to the storyline because it has to be enjoyable and it has to be something I know can be fun to work on for the next month or two. That, and there has to be a reason for someone to buy my book. You can go into a comic store and there are 200 books on the rack..."Why should they buy my comic book?" Any creator who isn't asking that question is not concerned with selling their product and continuing to perpetuate what's a very enjoyable career. In *Vamperotica #4*, Luxura is confronted by Blood Hunter, this big, muscular, superhero-looking type who shows up to possibly kill her. It gets to the point where you think they're going to get into this knock-down, drag-out fight and Luxura opens her mouth and breathes fire at him. We got more mail about that issue: "What the hell is going on? What is this? Why is this happening? Do your vampires breathe fire? What's going on? What is this?"

PH: *What do you do to keep your fans happy?*

KL: We go out of our way to be good to the people who contact us. I write back. A lot of people at shows - I recognize them. *{Editor's note: It is not uncommon for Kirk to remember a face, and match a previous purchase with it.}* I'm real tenacious about treating the people who buy my book with respect and appreciation. Comic fans are the best. More than movies, more than sports, comic fans are the absolute best. They'll tell their friends about your comics, they'll drive miles to a show just to see you. I've never heard of an industry that has that sort of cooperative effort on the part of the people who are creating the stuff and the people who are buying it. With *Vamperotica #1* we had some special editions printed. There were a bunch of people who sent me nice letters, so I sent them free comics. Some of those gold editions are now worth $20-$25 each. {But} It's not gonna kill me to give a few. Gene Brenner {Brenner Printing} told me once, "Don't believe in your own success. Just keep making something good for the people who are buying it and remember the people who are buying it." I keep that in the back of my mind. For a second you start to think, "Hey, maybe I'm a hot shot," but then I remember. There's a lot of comics out there and without fans what am I going to do?

Nancy Collins cont. from page 19

MAD: *You're so strongly identified with vampires. What are your thoughts on the glut of vampire material and what might happen if there's a backlash?*

NC: To tell you the truth, I don't quite understand it. {laughs} Even though I'm best known for writing vampire novels, that's not what I read. I've met so many people who read nothing but vampire fiction. I don't quite understand the attraction, in fact, I think you have to have a certain disdain for the concept behind the vampire in order to write a decent vampire novel. You have to understand the horror of it all and what the characters really are. You have to be dispassionate about it in order to write about it, and you can't believe it either. {laughs} Everyone I've ever met who says they really believe in vampires, if you read any of their stuff, it's absolute crap! They all think they operate by rules just like Monopoly or something. "Do not pass go, do not go out in daylight..." I don't read vampire fiction because I don't want to get contaminated or run the risk of being accused of plagiarism. That, and I don't want to get mad when I realize someone's ripping me off. Unless someone drags it to my attention, unless someone comes out with a female vampire killer with a silver switchblade and mirrored sunglasses, I'm not gonna pay that much attention. People tried to get me to sue John Landis a few years ago over **Innocent Blood**. If I was gonna sue him...if the movie was any good... But, naahh, that was one of the crappiest movies I ever saw. They should have just dubbed that woman. She looked good, but I couldn't understand a God-damned word she was saying!

MAD: *When are your editing projects coming out?*

NC: Relatively soon. *Forbidden Acts* just came out {Avon}. It features Alan Moore, Karl Wagner, John Shirley, Kathé Koja and Barry Malzberg, David Aaron Clark {fromer *Screw* editor}, Melissa Mia Hall and Doug Winter, Steve Rasnic Tem, Rex Miller {Spangberg}. Joe Bob Briggs did the introduction. There's a lot of not well-known people in there from the avant-garde and erotic press area: Michael Lee, {former *Gallery* editor}, Brooks Caruthers, best known as an absurdist playwright, and Danielle Willis, a professional vampire. She and her boyfriend have permanently bonded fangs and are licensed phlebotomists. They run ads in the swinger mags, "*Vampires come to your house and draw blood*," and they do! There's some pretty extreme stuff in here. People will probably get seriously offended by my story.

Dark Love will be out soon {Penguin/Roc}, with an original novellette by Stephen King, a story by the late Michael O'Donoghue, and one of Wagner's last stories. It's got Shirley, Winter, Koja, John

Lutz {*Single White Female*}, Stuart Kaminsky, John Peyton Cook, David J. Schow, Robert Weinberg, Ramsey Campbell, Richard Laymon, Bob Burden {*Flaming Carrot*}, George Chesboro, Kathy Ptacek, Michael Blumlein, Ed Gorman, Lucy Taylor and I've got a story called *Basil Copper*. The intro is by T.E.D. Klein. It's more like an erotic thriller anthology. Except for a few little touches, there are no super-natural elements. It has a nice Mel Odom cover.

I don't quite understand the attraction {with vampires}. I think you have to have a certain disdain for the concept behind the vampire in order to write a decent vampire novel.

MAD: *What do you think of the state of the horror market? Do you think there will be a rebirth?*

NC: It's a slow but sure process. They flooded the market with so much crap it obviously did some damage. But they're still putting out a lot of anthologies that seem to be selling. White Wolf has proven there's interest. But I don't think {publishers} are shooting at the right market. They're still thinking it's some housewife or middle-aged guy. They're still striving for that mall walk-in kind of person and I think the readership is a lot broader than they're willing to admit, or able to understand. It's becoming a lot more discerning, you can't just slap a skeleton on a black cover anymore and expect it to sell. I don't plan to be toiling in the vineyard of dark fantasy for the rest of my life. I may end up having a considerable amount of my works in it, but I'm also trying to work my way into some suspense work and Southern Gothic and stuff like that. No writer can just stay in one field, unless it's a vast field or you tie down such a huge percentage of the market like Stephen King or Louis L'Amour that your name becomes synonymous with it. I want to try my hand at other things. I kind of did that with *Walking Wolf*. It's a western about werewolves.

MAD: *Is that the limited edition?*

NC: Yeah, there's 2000 and I think 100 limited.

MAD: *Any plans to bring it out mainstream?*

NC: It's such a thin book, more like a long novella, so the paperback companies have been a bit hesitant about it. But if I get a movie deal they'll take it. Harper-Collins keeps poking at. The British publishers are hesitant about it because it is so idiosynchratically American. My German publishers couldn't figure out how to translate it, since it's Mark Twainish type dialogue. They just put their hands up and say, "It's a very interesting book, but, oh...we cannot do this." {Laughs} It's gotten a lot of attention and good reviews from *Publishers Weekly*, *Locus*, and *Rocky Mountain News*. I plan on doing a sequel in the next couple of years, but I'm not rushing it, considering it took me the better part of six years to do the research on this one.

MAD: *Are there any other new projects you'd like to talk about?*

NC: *Jason vs. Leatherface* features Jeff Butler {*Badger*} on pencils and Steve Montayo on inks. Simon Bisley is doing the covers. I've got a story I adapted in *Verotika* #3, 4, and 5. The new *Sonia Blue* book will be out next year, called *A Dozen Black Roses*. I'm working on an original piece for the Borealis line from White Wolf, which is original hardback fiction, called *Angels on Fire*, a romantic, dark fantasy about a woman who falls in love with an angel she finds crash-landed on her rooftop.

I ghost-edited *The Ultimate Haunted House*, with illustrations by Gahan Wilson, which ties into his CD-ROM game.

My husband is adapting one of my short stories, *Rant*, to a short underground film. We're also doing a spoken word CD where he and a couple of other people do readings of my work. He's doing the original soundtracks for them. Hopefully by spring we'll be opening an art gallery in Denver specializing in alternative underground art from the likes of R. Crumb, Robert Williams, H. R. Giger...

I've got a lot of stuff going. I'm always trying to shake up work out of comics and, I've got screenplays I'm working on. This software company in Britain is making overtures about doing *Midnight Blue* in Hypertext, maybe as a video game, too. And I'm writing *The Big Book of Losers* for Paradox Press, that should be out within the next 18 months.

Basically, I'm just doing the same old stuff, cranking out stories and books and trying to tread water.

I LOOK AT THIS PIECE OF HUMAN FLOTSAM AND SEE AN ASSHOLE SO ALIENATED, SO STUNTED, THAT HIS DRIVING DREAM IS TO BE A WALKING DEADMAN. AND I START TO REMEMBER...

Art from *Real Thing*, Weird Business
©1995, Morgan

BENEATH THE RACKS

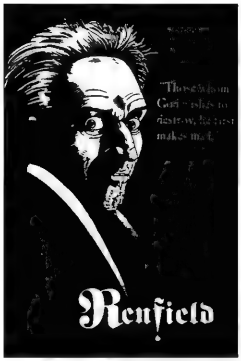
News & Reviews from the world of independents

Monks & Fisher go STRAIGHT TO HELL

The outlaw publishers of Boneyard Press and CFD Productions are moving souls around the U.S. this month on their Straight to Hell tour. Joe Monks {*Cry For Dawn, NightCry*} and Hart D. Fisher {*Bill the Bull, Babylon Crush*} are hitting the East and Wests coasts on a month-long tour.

Scheduled states include New York, Pennsylvania, Connecticut, Ohio, Massachusetts and California, winding up in LA with a special bondage themed Halloween Party Oct. 28, featuring a Babylon Crush/Sirens of Darkness look-alike contest and a champagne bar.

The tour will be supported by special edition comic books, including *Babylon Crush #3* and *Bill the Bull #4*, a tour T-shirt and more. Call {518} 383-1856 for current dates, leave message for complete listing.



The acclaimed Caliber series based on Bram Stoker's *Dracula*, *Renfield* is now available as a graphic novel. Instead of re-releasing issues #1-3, the big guys decided to finish the storyline in here {160 pgs, $8.95 USA}, equivalent to six issues, written by Kyle Garrett and illustrated by Galen Showman.

The premise of *Renfield* is the retelling of the *Dracula* story through the eyes of the bug-eating inmate of the asylum, the mysterious Renfield.

White Wolf gains new rights for publication

White Wolf Publishing recently acquired rights to publish titles by some of the hottest authors in the writing field. They are:

The Day I Swapped My Dad for Two Goldfish, by **Neil Gaiman**, hardcover picture book, illustrated by **Dave McKean**, July 1996.

Bending the Landscape, by **Stephe Pagel** and **Nicola Griffith**, hardcover anthology, Feb. 1996.

Virgins & Martyrs, by **Simon Maginn**, p-back novel, March 1996.

Resume with Monsters, by **William Browning Spencer**, p-back novel, April 1996.

The Earth Strikes Back, by **Richard Chizmar**, p-back anthology, April 1996.

Watchstar Trilogy, by **George Zebrowski**, TPB omnibus, Aug. 1996.

Enemy Mine, by **Barry Longyear**, TPB omnibus, Sept. 1996.

Caliber brings Moebius, Ellis to the front line

The year 1996 will ring for Caliber Comics. Moebius and Warren Ellis will each be featured in new series to be published by the independent company.

Caliber recently revealed that ***Moebius Comics*** will debut in Spring 1996, featuring classic short stories by the critically acclaimed artist, as well as looking into Moebius' private sketchbooks.

"I'm really looking forward to the challenge," said *Negative Burn* Editor Joe Pruett. "This is truly the opportunity of a lifetime."

A 32-page, b/w, bi-monthly series, *Moebius Comics* will include a gallery section displaying some of the artist's unique images, and will also feature William Stout, Paul Pope and others.

Warren Ellis is bringing his all-new, original graphic novel *X=X* to Caliber in mid- to late '96. Known for his outstanding writing on *Thor, Excalibur, Hellstorm* and *Ruins* {Marvel}, Ellis is hoping his upcoming work with Caliber will be the first of many creator-owned projects, James Pruett, Caliber editor, said.

X=X is a conversation in a downtown Manhattan bar, between a young female journalist looking for a filler article for a Village magazine and a mysterious Englishmen who, she's been told, has useful information regarding it. The article: The Gemstone File, one of the more fascinating conspiracy documents of our time, detailing the secret history of the 20th Century USA.

A b/w, graphic novel, *X=X* does not yet have an artist, James Pruett said.

Editors Note: Because of space constraints {hey, we already added another 8 pages}, reviews in this issue of LACUNAE are limited. Tune in next issue for more extensive reviews, including vampire books, games & comics. And, if you took the time to read this: GREAT!! Send your name & address today to win a RAGE Limited Edition Starter Pack!!

BRAM STOKER'S Burial of the Rats

Based on the original film from Concorde-New Horizons
Adapted by: Jerry Prosser
Pencils: Fransisco Solano Lopez;
Inks: Val Mayerik
Publisher: Cosmic Comics
Cost: $2.50 USA, $3.50 CAN
SPECS: 32 f/c pgs, f/c cover
Order/info: 6855 Santa Monica Blvd, Ste 406, LA, CA 90038

You don't have to love Bram Stoker's classic novel *Dracula* to appreciate this adaption of a 1995 film. In #1, Bram is held by women of the Rats - the cruel creatures after blood & flesh. After defying one sentence of death, he is on his way to another, all because of his love for his father. Will he make it?

The coloring, along with the artist's fine illustrating, gave a feel of The Inn series in *Sandman*. Lopez's rendition of elder men and women is astounding; his female structure realistic.

Told as an auto-biography, this series is one not to miss, mixing history here and there with a taste of horror and suspense we all love. - G.M. Lance

STRAY BULLETS

What can we say about this hard-hitting series written & illustrated by David Lapham?

Buy it, buy it, buy it!!!

Believe us, you don't know what you're missing.

Don't miss David's extensive interview in LACUNAE #5, shipping December 1995.

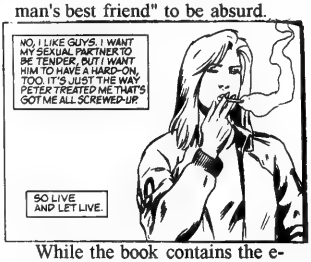
WEIRD BUSINESS™

A hardback anthology of various comic stories.
Edited by: Joe R. Lansdale, Richard Klaw
Publisher: MOJO Press
Cost: $29.95 USA, $38.95 CAN
Specs: 406 b&w pgs, 12 f/c pgs
Order/Info: P O Box 140005, Austin, TX 78754; mojo@eden.com

"If you're tired of the same ole business. If you want something unique." That's what the editors say about Weird Business. As they should. Delve into a pool of of awesome, original storytelling and phenomenal art overall.

Featuring some of the best writers & illustrators in the biz, ie. Nancy Collins, Joe Lansdale, John Picacio, John Lucas, Roger Zelazny, *Wierd Business* is a collage of twisted stories. Adaptions of Robert Bloch and Poe stories are a great plus. Featuring genres like horror, mystery and humor under one hard cover, this is a great read for bedtime, waiting in doctors' offices, at work.

Collins' new story about Sonia Blue is a must for vampire fanatics, and Richard Klaw's adaption of Lansdale's *Steel Valentine* is truly twisted - it's a story that proves the saying, "dog is man's best friend" to be absurd.


NO, I LIKE GUYS. I WANT MY SEXUAL PARTNER TO BE TENDER, BUT I WANT HIM TO HAVE A HARD-ON, TOO. IT'S JUST THE WAY PETER TREATED ME THAT'S GOT ME ALL SCREWED-UP.
SO LIVE AND LET LIVE.

While the book contains the equivalent of at least 10 comics, $29.95 does seem like a heavy chunk of change to lay down for a book. But I assure you, it's worth. Try getting a couple of friends to go in on the purchase.

Wierd Business is not just a book to read, it's a book to keep on the shelf, allowing visitors to thumb through, perhaps borrow. Granted, while there are a small handful of stories that leave more to be desired, the title offers hours of relaxing comic stories, many guaranteed to make you think, squirm and laugh, "A-ha!"

Dedicated to the memory of Robert Bloch, *Weird Business* is printed on fine-grade paper. I was impressed with the gold printing on the book's black surface, including an eyeball logo on the front cover. - G.M. Lance

FREE COMICS!!!

That's right, folks! Free comics for you! Each month, LACUNAE lets one lucky person help clear the warehouse of comics from afar - big ones, little ones, even itty-bitty ones. Help us clear out comics and other items provided for review by sending your name, address and signed statement you are 18 or older to:

LACUNAE
32 Tallow Wood Drive
Clifton Park NY 12065

or, e-mail: lacunaemag@aol.com

ATMOSFEAR

© A Couple 'A Cowboys Pty Limited
Dist. by: Mattel
Cost: @ $40 USA

A hair raising, spine tingling, bone chilling adventure through a world of Mummies, Zombies, Vampires, Werewolves, Witches, Poltergeists, and sometimes a SoulRanger or two, Atmosphere should be one of the hardest hitting games this fall. For some, it could be a nightmare.

It's not your ordinary, old fashioned board game. Technology wouldn't allow that. A multimedia role playing board game with video interaction, Atmosfear always ends differently. No one player is better than another because the Gatekeeper, Atmosfear's timekeeper and referee, will never let the same person win. He deals out punishments and penalties, he rules the game play with an iron fist. Sometimes you get lucky, but winning is difficult with the Gatekeeper watching over you. The Gatekeeper alone presides over the other side, keeping the peace in the provinces until doomsday - or, whatever comes next.

Gameplay can be fast and exciting for 3-6 players, and with little complication. You first write your greatest fear and drop it in the Well of Fears. You start as a SoulRanger in quest of becoming a Harbinger. Then you must travel through 6 provinces, or through 1-3 sewers and provinces, collecting different colored key-stones which bestow certain powers. Once all 6 colors are collected, you return to the central hub. When you roll a 6 you draw a fear from the Well of Fears. If you draw someone else's fear you win. If you draw your own, you return to your Headstone and try again.

Without the video, Atmosfear would be dull. The Gatekeeper "lives" on the tape and, at random intervals, interrupts the game with directions for players: sometimes good, but usually for worse.

Atmosfear is a revealing look at people's fears. It can also test your ability to be quick with the dice.

- Carl Pietrantonio II

RAGE

Dist. by: White Wolf
Cost: $15.95 D-Starter; $7.95 Starter

Based on the popular Werewolf: The Apocalypse game. Players control various packs of werewolves - Garou - fighting against each other and the Wyrm, an evil force bent upon the destruction of environment. Politically correct American Indian wannabe tree-hugging shapechang ing furballs anyone?

Gameplay is fairly easy. There are some aspects of politics, but the main focus is on combat. Players take turns simultaneously.

This is truly a multi-player card game, with people aiding or antagonizing each other and alliances being forged {and broken!}. A game can be played relatively quickly, with the victory conditions being customizable from game to game. You can win without even engaging another player in combat or even through political savvy.

If you're not familiar with RAGE, you'll want to pick up Savage Attack - a player's guide to RAGE {208 pgs, $7.95, ISBN 1-56504-396-0}. Though you are provided a tiny rulebook with the Starter and Double Starter decks, it is lacking in content. It allows for quick-play starting, but the rules are vague and no example of play are given. So if you don't understand something, prepare to be frustrated. Savage Attack includes background info, tips on deck building, a comic and a short story, as well as a listing of cards and errata and FAQs.

If you're willing to pay five cents more for the limited edition Double Starter deck, you won't get much more than you would buying two Starter decks, save for the box that houses the decks. OK, it's five more cents for a nice box, really, with a cute, little die-cut claw mark on the front.

Starter packs have 60 cards of characters, combat and Sept cards, such as Gifts cards. Some packs also contain Past Lives cards that depict legendary werewolves and are foil-enhanced.

Physically, the cards look great. The limited edition also have a hologram in the lower corner that guards against counterfeiting.

The Umbra is the latest expansion set, consisting of booster packs {$1.95} of 12 cards each, adding new rules, characters, and other cards for the game.

The additions are great, giving more flavor and variety to the game. Instead of merely beating enemies senseless, you can "bind" them and make them attack for you. The dimension-hopping aspect is fun and really opens up the game to further strategies.

- Mike A. Davis

REVIEWS NEXT ISSUE

Vampire the Masquerade
game & novels

Borderlands IV

The Blood of Angels
by Stephen Gregory

All vampire stories are rape fantasy... Fear sells and sex sells. The ad execs on Madison Avenue know this. If you fear that your bad breath will keep you from getting laid, you're gonna buy that mouthwash.

--_VAMPS_ writer Elaine Lee

Talk about sexy vampires. Hubba-Hubba.

Those were my thoughts when I first picked up an issue of *VAMPS I.* Giving credit where credit's due, we can applaud the artistic values of Will Simpson.

But where would he have been without writer Elaine Lee? The *VAMPS* miniseries might have never seen the *light of day* at Vertigo.

YOU'RE VERY MUCH AFRAID NOW, AUDREY.. THIS IS A LITTLE MORE THAN YOU BARGAINED FOR...GOOD...GOOD..
NO... NO, I...
YOU SMELL LIKE LOVE AND MONEY, MOMMI. I COULD EAT YOU!

Hollywood Vein #1

VAMPS chronicles the escapades of five women, the thralls of a vampire named Dave, who they turn on and "kill" early on - truly a display of how "the sisterhood is powerful." Female lead Howler and fellow bloodsuckers Skeeter, Screech, Mink, and Whipsnake, embark down their own road of destiny on Harley Davidsons. In issue #1, we learn Howler's transformation, and her quest to accept her vampire nature becomes a main storyline of the 6-issue series.

Residing in the Hudson Valley {Upstate NY} "where all the old hippies go to spawn and die," Elaine is comfortable where, as she puts it, there's a huge community of comics, horror, fantasy and sci-fi writers and artists. At 42, she is "refusing to age. I still have hair down to my butt." She grew up in a small town in North Carolina and later escaped to Stevens College in Missouri, where she earned a degree in theatre, then began to worry: "What do I do now? {I could} stay down south and marry a doctor and become an alcoholic or I could become a movie star."

In 1979 and 1980, Elaine played the role of Mildred Trumble on NBC's soap, *Doctors.* She was nominated for an Emmy, then was written out of the show.

The Belle-turned-Yankee said acting distracted her writing. So with a group of young actors, Elaine formed Wild Hair Productions, where she co-wrote plays with her sister, Susan Norfleet, and performed them throughout the Big Apple.

After attending a performance of *The Contamination of the Kokomo Lounge*, Michael Wm. Kaluta got roped into working on the *Starstruck* play {poster, costumes, sets}, Elaine said. Soon after, Elaine wrote *Starstruck*, a comic based on the play's characters, published in *Heavy Metal* {1985}, and then by Epic Comics. Since, she has worked on *The Transmutation of Ike Garuda* and *Saint Sinner* {Epic/Marvel}, *Ragman: Cry of the Dead* {DC}, *The Galactic Girl Guide* stories {Comico}, and *Starstruck: The Expanding Universe* {Dark Horse}. NBM published her first collection of erotic sci-fi stories, *Skin Tight Orbit*, in February and another volume is slated for this month. She's also worked on *Indiana Jones and the Spear of Doom* {DH}, *Prince Valiant* {Marvel} and some stories for Charles Vess's *Book of Ballads and Sagas.*

Elaine's keeping busy these days working on a CD-ROM fantasy role-playing game and a

new sci-fi series.

The *VAMPS II: Hollywood and Vein* series begins in December, subsequently with the collected book of *VAMPS I.* More sexy vampires for blood-sucking fans everywhere.

bloody interview by Christopher Tower

CT: *Where did the* VAMPS *idea come from? Was this something you proposed or did DC ask for it?*

EL: Will Simpson and I met at the Glasgow Comic Con in March of '91. Charles Vess introduced us because we both expressed interest in doing comics based on Irish mythology. We hit it off instantly and decided to propose several projects. One was *VAMPS*, which has *nothing* to do with Irish Mythology. Will likes to draw women, he was working on *Hellblazer* with Garth Ennis. In one issue there was a scene with the King of the Vampires surrounded by a bevy of naked vampire "brides." I was in the middle of a marriage breakup and thought, "Well, there are those brides again! I wonder what would happen if they decided to *divorce* the guy?" That was the beginning of *VAMPS.*

CT: *Did you read comics as a young girl or in college?*

EL: My dad was a sci-fi fan and bought my sisters and me lots of comics, took us to horror movies and encouraged all those things most parents believe will rot your brain or land you in therapy. I liked superhero books, the more outlandish the better: cities in bottles, amazons fighting gods, aliens with big green heads, mer-people in Atlantis, kryptonite turning Superboy into the Sphinx. I was first into the DC characters: Wonder Woman, Superman, Aquaman, Green Lantern. Later I liked team books, like *Fantastic Four* and the *Avengers*, because they had girls in them. I hit puberty and forgot about comics. In college I picked up the occasional *Zap* or other underground, and read *National Lampoon.* In my early 20s I discovered *Heavy Metal* and the European comics artists. That revived my interest in comics. If I hadn't found Moebius, there would have been no *Starstruck.*

CT: *What was the attraction to the theatre that drew you in during college?*

EL: I started college an art major, but it was pretty boring. I was a rebellious type and 4 years of drawing fruit in a bowl was more than I could stand. I wanted to skip right to the Sistine Chapel, if you know what I mean. I kept picturing myself, sitting in a mall somewhere, selling charcoal portraits of mall crawlers at 25-bucks a pop. The theatre was about instant gratification. I could already walk and talk, so how hard could acting be? The main problem I had with college acting was that I was one of those kids who looked 12 when I was 18. They kept casting me as children. I wanted to be Lady MacBeth and couldn't figure out why nobody was seeing things my way. I eventually graduated with a degree in theatre. *Yikes! Now, whadda I do?* It was such a shock.

CT: *How would you characterize your work in comics? What kind of a writer are you?*

EL: I think I'm good with character and expressing character through dialogue. I have an ear for language that probably comes through my actor's training. I try to *hear* everything my characters are saying, the sound and rhythm being just as important as the meaning of the words. I make the characters first, and they tell me what they want to do. I like adult comics, so I can say the truth about things. I like to write about relationships, whether between men & women, or women & women, or men & men. I like to stretch the boundaries of those relationships by putting them in weird settings - in a pod on an asteroid, or in an alternate universe, or in a graveyard at sunset. When you take a normal situation and remove it from our reality, take it out of its social and moral context, you can talk about it in new ways. It may be fantasy, but it's still truth. Maybe more of the the truth than you'd get in realistic fiction.

CT: *What are your influences?*

EL: My first influences were my Dad's sci-fi books, read when I was too young to understand them. I have powerful and disturbing, disconnected images from these books I can't name. They float through my dreams at night. Old horror movies, watched every Saturday morning on b&w TV- *House of Wax, Day of the Triffids, The Blob,* all the Frank- ensteins and Draculas and their brides. *The Wizard of Oz. The Twilight Zone.* Comic books, from the days when Wonder Woman still wept for the "world of man." Fairy tales where the female had to undergo great suffering and overcome tremendous obstacles: *The Little Mermaid, The Seven Swans. The Diary of Ann Frank* {which gifted me a lifetime of evil Nazi dreams}. Bible stories, especially the ones about bad women who seduced great men or danced for heads on platters; the ones about fiery furnaces and plagues of frogs were good. *Dark Shadows, Star Trek* and *Lost in Space*, that movie where Zsa Zsa Gabor is the Queen of the Amazons on Venus. The nearly two years I spent in a body cast {age 15-17}. TV commercials. GROWING UP IN THE SOUTH.

Later: Thomas Pynchon, Kurt Vonnegut, Joseph

Heller. All those women poets who stuck their heads in ovens, and a few who didn't. Diane Arbus, who saw the bizarre in the ordinary {and killed herself, too}. Robert Altman's movies. LSD. All that sex everybody was having back when we were taking LSD. Cordwainer Smith, Frank Herbert, Alfred Bester. Moebius. Michael Kaluta. The feminist theologians who wrote during the late 70s and early 80s. Carl Jung. Joseph Campbell. Frank Zappa. All the gay boys and drag queens I knew when I was first in the city {when Disco was King}. Samurai movies. The thousands of plays I read. FIFTEEN YEARS IN MANHATTAN. And, Motherhood.

CT: *What do you think was the main attraction to* VAMPS *that made it such a popular book?*

EL: Gee... Sex? Danger? Dangerous sex? Sexy danger? Sexy dangerous vampire girls on Harleys? All of the above? {laughs} People bought it for the same reason they watch *Fatal Attraction* or the O.J. trial. The idea of love turning deadly is fascinating. All vampire stories are rape fantasy. In *VAMPS*, the male victim is taken against his will. It's certainly a story for our times. In the past, sex was usually dangerous only for women. Have sex with the wrong person, and you might end up pregnant out of wedlock {and shunned by society}, stoned to death for being an adulteress, or forcibly married to a jerk for the rest of your life. Or, you might end up meeting Mr. Goodbar {he's still bigger and stronger than we are} and having your head bashed in for your trouble. Even the most cautious of women stood a good chance of dying in childbirth. But with the advent of AIDS, and the availability of numerous types of small firearms, the male is getting a little taste of what women have always known: Fear sells and sex sells. The ad execs on Madison Avenue know this. If you fear that your bad breath will keep you from getting laid, you're gonna buy that mouthwash. Beyond that, *VAMPS* was fun. I hope people got some laughs out of it.

CT: *How does* VAMPS II: Hollywood and Vein *differ from* VAMPS I*?*

EL: If I were pitching the first series in Hollywood, I might say, "It's *Dracula* meets *Basic Instinct* on motorcycles." The second series is more like "*Interview with a Vampire* meets *The Player* on a casting couch." *Hollywood and Vein* has a more involved story and focuses on Mink, Skeeter and Screech, while Howler and Whipsnake step back a bit. The girls park their Harleys and make the LA party scene. They feed on would-be actors because nobody misses them. One of the victims from the first series, who wasn't quite dead when Skeeter left him lying in an alley, comes back as a major character. We learn what it's like to be fed

If I were pitching the first series in Hollywood, I might say, "It's Dracula meets Basic Instinct on motorcycles."

Not vampire, but no longer quite human. There's a bit more vampire mythology in this series. There are two new vampires who live very different lives from our girls. One's a female beat poet, a cult figure who lives off the blood of her fans. The other is a paraplegic sonnet-writing Elizabethan vampire. And, since we're in Hollywood, there are lots of other bloodsuckers, many of whom aren't vampires. Mink has dragged the other Vamps out to smoggy LA, so she can pursue her chosen career, Goddess of the Silver Screen. As you might imagine, things don't go according to plan.

CT: *You mentioned that the attraction of VAMPS was sex...*

EL: Vampire stories *are* rape fantasy, even when the {usually male} vampire can't physically do the deed. The vampire is an extreme version of that really attractive, energy draining guy you know you shouldn't get involved with. But he's really good in the sack. The reader either identifies with the vampire/rapist or the human victim. Then there's that other character, the victim's human lover, Jonathan Harker and his kin. For him, the vampire is seducer, the other man who lures his love away. Some readers identify with this guy. I don't. I'm not that masochistic. I tend to pong back and forth between the vampire and the victim. You could make a case that the victim is a masochist, but at least the victim gets *something* out of it.

CT: *What kinds of readers are attracted to* VAMPS*? Is there a target audience?*

EL: I never have a target audience in mind for anything I write. I write what pleases me. Whenever I've tried to write what someone else wants me to write, it's turned out badly. I think I'm getting some folks from the horror audience to come over into Comic Book Land. I'm getting more letters from women than usual. They seem to like that the female characters are powerful. I also get letters from men who like the sexy babes. I get some Vertigo readers, but I seem to lose some of the hardcore Anglophiles, the Vamps being American. I sign more books at horror conventions than I do at comic book conventions.

CT: *The cycles - it's like they're some kind of Hell's Angels Biker vampires.*

EL: Will's first idea was a vampire rock band, but I nixed that because I kept seeing page after page of vampires holding guitars with musical notes floating out of them. The motorcycles help us keep the

story moving. We get to change locals. They're sexy, visual... Tough women ride Harleys.

CT: *What's been the reception to* VAMPS *by the feminist quarter?*

EL: I'm not sure. I usually manage to infuriate anyone who holds any party line opinion. Back during the *Starstruck* play, which is about lots of women in space who do things guys usually get to do, Michael Kaluta was standing in the lobby at intermission one night. On one side of him, these two macho guys were talking, one saying, "Vicious bitches, must hate men!" On the other side, two women in business suits, one saying, "Skimpy costumes for a feminist play!" You can't win. With *VAMPS*, I've gotten letters asking if the sexy babes weren't just a tad sexist. All of these were from men, who seemed to be worried about how women might respond to it. The letters from women were overwhelmingly positive. I'm not sure if these were feminists. One retailer in Manhattan told me *VAMPS* was popular with his lesbian customers. The only flak I've gotten was from a guy who was very upset I let the gals take their Harleys into the grave with them. My answer: If the dirt doesn't mess up their hair, it probably won't hurt the bikes.

CT: {laughs} *Do you have to get yourself in a certain mindset to write scripts for* VAMPS*?*

EL: Ha! Writing *VAMPS* gets me into a certain mindset.

CT: *Biker vamps, skimpy costumes, wild sexuality. Are the* VAMPS *women based on people you know, aspects of yourself, characteristics of many people, or a combination?*

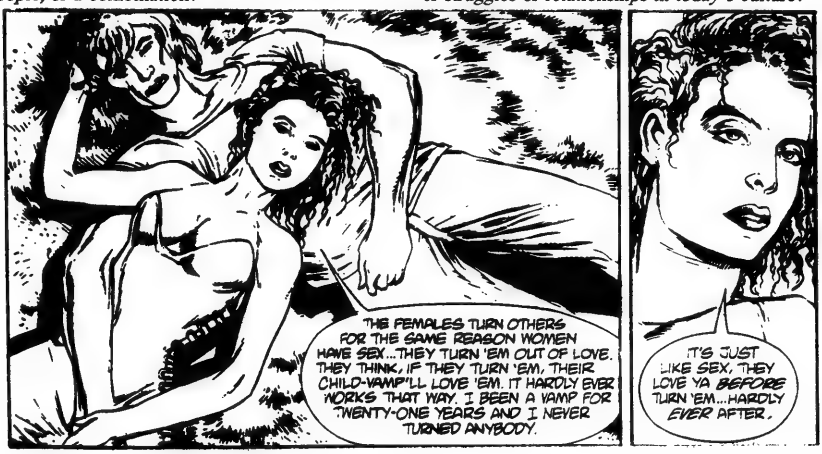
The vampire is an extreme version of that really attractive, energy draining guy you know you shouldn't get involved with. But he's really good in the sack.

EL: All the characters I write are based on aspects of myself, even the guys. There's a lot of me in Hank Gallagher, for instance {we both have a streak of idealism}, or in *Starstruck*'s Harry Palmer and Randall Factor. I wrote about this in the intro for the trade paperback, so I won't go into it here. I'll bore myself. But, yes. They're all me or bits of me from various stages of my life. Mixed with traits stolen from other folks I've known, especially a group of wild women I used to hang out with during the city years.

CT: *The Vamps feed off men nearly every time. Do they prefer men to women? Are we going to see them feed off more women in* VAMPS II*?*

EL: I like men. I'm heterosexual and I get off on writing it. Men are easy pickin's for women who look like the Vamps - fast food, you might say. All the blood leaves the brain in that rush to the groin, and they follow the Vamps out of the bar, like sheep for slaughter. I think most of our male readers could see themselves doing that. In the beginning, I was going to make Screech a lesbian. I patterned her on a lesbian, Chinese friend. But when I was working on the proposal, there were all these protests about {*Basic Instinct*}. "Why is it that all lesbians in movies turn out to be psycho killers?" I pulled back on it. I made her sort of sexually ambivalent, more likely than the others to go for women. I let myself be drawn into political correctness, only because I felt there was some truth in what the protesters were saying. But don't be surprised if things start changing.

CT: *Is VAMPS a metaphor for male/female power struggles or relationships in today's culture?*


THE FEMALES TURN OTHERS FOR THE SAME REASON WOMEN HAVE SEX...THEY TURN 'EM OUT OF LOVE. THEY THINK, IF THEY TURN 'EM, THEIR CHILD-VAMP'LL LOVE 'EM. IT HARDLY EVER WORKS THAT WAY. I BEEN A VAMP FOR TWENTY-ONE YEARS AND I NEVER TURNED ANYBODY.
IT'S JUST LIKE SEX, THEY LOVE YA *BEFORE* TURN 'EM...HARDLY *EVER* AFTER.

EL: Oh, good grief no! It's about sex! Of course, sex is about power, but to talk about *VAMPS* in social/political terms is like those awful, boring people who think if you let someone get on top of you in bed that somehow spills over into every aspect of your life and you become a doormat. Often the opposite is the case. You do things in bed you would *never* do in life-out-of-bed. I never, for instance, feel the urge to go out and drain all the blood out of a pretty young man. I'm a mom. I take my kid to Cub Scouts and soccer practice. I read bedtime stories. I also write rather violent comic books about female vampires. I live with a sweet, gentle man who cooks and plants roses in the yard and who is quite capable of turning into a satyr several times a week. Sometimes we fight. Then we can both look like the Vamps with their fangs bared, ready for action. I guess we all have the vampire and the victim within us. But the Vamps in no way stand for the '90s woman, with the victims playing proxy for the emasculated modern man. I don't believe he's been emasculated. In my experience, nice, kind, intelligent men are much better lovers than their macho counterparts. The Vamps may be that part of us that enjoys the feeling of having complete power over another. Women *and* men have that in them, but women have been given fewer opportunities to experience this through fiction. The Vamps seem to be giving them that.

CT: *What would you like to write that you haven't yet written?*

EL: I'd like to write a screenplay and have somebody give me great pots of money for it. Then, I'd like to finish a book on Celtic mythology that's languishing in my computer because there's no money in it at all.

CT: *Is there any correlation between work you had done in comics before and* VAMPS*?*

EL: If any character in any of my books makes a long, idealistic speech full of sappy cliches, it means they're about to be hit in the head with a pipe or killed in some horrible fashion. {See *Starstruck* #2, pg. 27; *VAMPS* #6, pg. 16} I do this to remind myself of the truth in it. I have an unruly streak of idealism and have been hit upside the head by quite a few pipes. I like to make people laugh at things they shouldn't be laughing at. It bothers me that so many people equate intelligence with cynicism and with a lack of humor. So whenever I catch myself getting too smart for anyone's good, I feel obligated to have one character hit another with a big hot dog or some oversized object, or crack some silly joke. I like to talk about religion as though it were sex, and sex as though it were religion. I almost always have music drifting through my stories, because we are so affected by it in real life. I put chattering TVs in many scenes, because they're always playing in the background everywhere we go. For some reason, I do lots of characters with Daddy problems. And I'm fascinated with twins, clones, droids, dopplegangers from the far side of the sun, and other sets of characters who look just alike.

CT: *You've adapted stories about the Galactic Girl Guides from* Starstruck*?*

EL: I was doing that for Tundra. We finished four of the five books we had contracted and then everything that happened with Tundra, well... happened. The work is beautiful, charming and funny. It's just sitting, waiting for a publisher.

CT: *What else are you working on?*

EL: The second volume of *Skin Tight Orbit*, a collection of erotic sci-fi stories, drawn by various artists, will be out in October. I really like these stories, though they're very dark and not at all romantic. Most of them are about the way people fool themselves and each other when they've been bitten by the Love Bug {or the Lust Bug, actually}. Kaluta, Will Simpson, Phil Winslade, Max Douglas, Ray Lago and Mary Wilshire are some of the artists. Craig Hamilton did the hot covers. Both volumes will be available in comics shops or Tower Records, or you can get them directly from NBM by calling 1 800 886 1223. {Wow! Whadda pitch!} After that...well, I've just been given the OK on a sci-fi series, but I don't want to say too much about it, as I haven't signed the contract yet. I'm superstitious about that stuff.

VAMPS created & © Elaine Lee
Artwork © Will Simpson

THE RECRUITER

by Thea Atkinson

She lies still and quiet atop the wooden pallet - a rough, splintered bed with no pillow, no comfort. Shackled to it in a dark cellar. And as she lies there, trying not to move so the splinters won't bite into her flesh, her mind drifts. Never grasping a thought, nor tying it down, or making it her own. No feelings or emotions enter her soul. She is consciously ambivalent.

She can barely remember a time before this cellar, doubts if she can even remember her entrance to it. Each second of every day, right now, bleeds within her memory, an open wound on the flesh of her soul. And fear surrounds her; an impenetrable, tangible aura - her only blanket in the stone cellar. She shudders in the darkness, able to hear the dampness of the stone floor, and of the stone walls which enclose her. That constant gurgling and dripping of hot breath and sweat contacting and condensing on stone. Sounds of agony all around, muffled beneath the sounds of her own breathing, hoarse, and ragged.

She can smell the others, even feel the bodies of some of them., alive and breathing; but in agony as she is, wishing they were dead. She feels a presence next to her, bound to her; slick body rubbing her arm. The near proximity of the others was once a comfort, now it has become annoying.

She's not sure if the person is male or female; it's moans and breathing are indecipherable in the blackness. A recent occupant, she think's it's female. Perhaps because the skin that brushes her own is soft and smooth - an arm.

Her three long years have not gone easily, every day living the life of a gluttonous leech. Bled and bred, milked and managed.

She's shocked she has lasted so long; perhaps the duration has something to do with her lack of memory. She can remember little, wants to remember little. She suffers glimpses of sunshine, now and then, and a young girl laughing in air so clean it stings her nostrils. But the memories are painful, and she shuts them out.

A sigh breaks the chasm of her silence. Her companion feels wretched, she can tell. And she dares speak finally, taking the pain she hears as a plea for comfort. "Are you bound too tight?"

A feminine voice answers, and the smugness she feels about being correct is quickly eclipsed by the anguish she senses within. "No."

Her companion is suffering, she can tell; bondage is so insignificant when other horrors lurk on the horizon. And any mind can accept it, if it's the least of the atrocities.

"Good," she says, not knowing what else to say, and there her empathy ends. There is more to worry about than a novice who still suffers from a loss of blood. They are all suffering, but her own misery consumes her, and that's enough to saturate her soul. There can be no room within it for another's pain, another's anguish.

She has been alone with her thoughts for so long she has begun to imagine things. Not like most people imagine; not ghastly, frightening images - reality already provides those - but scents and sounds. Vague feelings of nostalgia and emotions. Often, in the bleak atmosphere, amid groans and sniffles, she imagines the smell of her home. A soft pink cushion from her ruffled bed crushed against her nose. The aroma awakens a stirring within her core. She quickly smothers it.

It has been frightening these past few years, being hoarded like gold, and milked like cattle, hidden away in some dark cellar large enough to house hundreds, only seeing the light long enough for health, but only if stringent regimens are followed. Only if the cattle behave.

Her mind wanders, fetches a memory. Like most it is unchained, unanchored; it floats freely to and from her mind like silt in a river. She lets it, unable to keep any cohesion within the thoughts anyway.

In the beginning there was God... Strange, she thinks, how that memory surfaces; a melody almost, fresh and invigorating. But it's crazy to believe in it - that there was a beginning or there is a God. To her, the beginning was the time. And she's all but driven out anything else.

Her luring; her kidnapping. They are imprinted on her soul. Yet a greater fear paralyzes her spine; her menses have stopped from stress or from the draining. It doesn't matter, it is unpardonable. The others can worry for themselves; her own terrors grip her as she contemplates the fate which waits.

Footsteps in the darkness, shuffling steps. The person approaching is hesitant, quiet, doesn't want to speak. Probably from guilt; so much of it here.

His duty keeps him alive, but she is certain by now he thinks it is a high price and would rather die. She knows who he is and feels a measure of irony in the accompanying pride. The darkness has heightened her senses, but what good are they here? Better they should be left dulled.

His voice is low, familiar, as she expects. Quiet, brooding Greg. Her mind fetches an image of him - seen on a dawn-dazzling airstrip, against the early sheen of sunrise. Again in a horror-filled room. Always silent; rarely an emotion crossing his face. She has seen him many times, but not since fainting, another unpardonable sin.

"Greg." She can't keep the relief from her harsh whisper as she feels his large hands on her arm, feeling for shackles. "Have you come for me, then?" She is glad it is he, glad it is not another who will take her to her fate. In an odd way, she loves Greg and his stoic manner.

"Yes." A simple word, but she can hear the remorse tightening his throat. "You'll get to see daylight once more."

Daylight Once a mundane word, then a privilege. Now it is doom.

He takes her sigh for consent and begins loosening her tethers. Her wrists don't even ache anymore. Once, a long time ago, weeks even, she had been allowed to roam free. A trusted cow; too stupid to jump over the short, rock wall.

They shuffle from the cellar together, two emaciated, forlorn companions, leaving behind them stifling, grunting moans. Into the crisp, smokey dawn. As the air begins to clear of the stench of dried blood and sweat, so does her mind. For once in three years, she allows herself to remember the beginning, the middle, and now, as she faces her end, the time itself.

The memories come, as she bids them, migrating from their hiding place into their place of birth. A plot of freshly dug, freshly covered earth. She had dug the grave herself, buried the memories without hesitation. Now they will be exhumed.

She remembers a beautiful man: tall, trim, hair the color of finely aged whiskey; his eyes of azure sky. Handsome man. Young. Beautifully made.

"Great little island. You'll love it," he says with a flash of teeth so white she is instantly dazzled, drawn in by his smile. Seduced.

She harbors a few doubts but, impulsive by nature, is willing to assuage them with careful questions. She is delighted to hear the "all expenses paid" vacation is to be paid by good old fashioned blood, sweat and tears. She will work to earn her stay.

"Oh, you'll have to work, just for awhile," he reassures her, letting his gaze linger on the pulse in her neck. Suddenly she wonders if he is attracted to her and finds herself attracted to him because of it. "Some waitressing, hostessing. Stuff like that. Once you've done your cycle, you can spend time recuperating. It's a grand resort." That smile again.

She can almost see the lights bounce off his teeth. "Let me pack," she says, flashing her own, knowing they look like aged ivory next to his of pure alabaster.

"You'll have to hurry. I'm flying the recruits out before morning." Blond hair falls over ice-blue eyes and for an instant, she hesitates. Something in his manner looks sinister, vaguely evil. Then it disappears so quickly she doubts her intuition. She ignores the frigid look in his eyes, the strange glint. Soon she and five other recruits board the plane. She is a little afraid.

But oh, the early morning flight. Any feelings of dread are adroitly smothered beneath the ambiance of the cabin. The flight invigorates her; and the wine, sweet as fresh grapes, feeds that invigoration. An alien electricity cloaks the air in the cabin; excitement squirms in every pore. A faint yearning slithers throughout the currents of speech, writhing in the sway of inflection and intonation.

Allure - the only word she can use to describe the atmosphere. In the moments she feels the dread lessen, and hopes it is merely the dread of fear. Fear she has exposed herself somehow and is left vulnerable. But within the cabin's heady aura, she convinces herself otherwise, settles in her seat and accepts the proffered wine, and delectable treats.

Every sense is coddled, baited. Plush, velvet seats warmed from some heater within the cushions. Music, nice and low, mollifies and subdues, engulfs and carries her. Not loud, just audible. Even the cabin walls divert her eye; painted murals, so rich they breathe the air that touches them, contain subtle hues, never glaring.

It's no fly-by-night operation, no danger inherent. She feels reassured.

There is contentment within her soul as she sits beside her recruiter. In the soft light he seems cut from marble - translucent, white marble. Too beautiful. She wants to touch the skin, run her finger down the chiseled chin. Hard keen lines to his profile; lust lodges in her belly and she can barely keep it from her voice as she dares to speak.

Allure - the only word to describe the atmosphere. And in the moments she feels the dread lessen, and hopes it is merely the dread of fear.

"Since my beginning," he says, voice like caramel: smooth and sticky. She thinks the response odd, but determines he simply means a long time. So long as to be forever - his forever. 'Philosophy,' she thinks, 'is so fitting here.' It makes the lust squirm within her.

She reaches out for him. It's too much to be this close and not feel his skin beneath her fingertips. But when she does, when the furtive caress returns a repulsive message to her mind, she draws it away. The flesh feels dead, hardly pliant. More alarming to her than the oddly preserved texture of his skin is the recognition she sees flash in his eyes. 'He has suffered this response before,' she thinks, and relief replaces the desire when he rises hastily from his seat and retreats to the rear of the plane. He sits there for the rest of the flight, eyes darting around the cabin like a cornered animal, avoiding physical contact.

She sighs heavily and clutches Greg's arm in a spasm of regret. The cobblestone path has merged to lush camomile turf. She knows the garden is near, she can smell the flowers and the dew that wets them. The faint scent of apple rises to her nose with each step and the camomile brings memories of its own.

The moon pulls a thin veil of clouds across her bosom, shrouding herself for her rest. Silence pervades the dawn, waiting for the ceremony.

He tightens his grip on her arm and her mind is once again illuminated by a memory of the first time she had seen him.

The plane lands just before dawn. From the window she can see the red slit of sun barely touching the horizon. A brief kiss of color proclaims to the world it's judge will soon hold court. The black silhouettes of palm trees look stark and lonely against the sheen of shadowed sky. The contrast of reds and blacks, oranges and yellows are awesome in the tropical heat. But even more awesome to her is Greg, who stands motionless against that sky. Stark himself, a black etched shadow listening stoicly to the orders being given him by the recruiter.

As she comes down the ramp, she strains her ear to hear the instructions, but can't make it out. Before she reaches ground, the recruiter scurries a-

way. Not even a pause for goodbyes.

It doesn't matter that the recruiter has deserted her. It is Greg who has her attention. Alien he seems, quiet, demure. A breathtaking sight. Tall, black. Deep black, she can tell as the sun rises to chase away the shadows, his color heightened by the contrast of the iridescence. His neatly cut afro forms a halo around a smooth, seraphic face. An image of cherubs and seraphs amid Victorian relics comes to her mind, and she smiles.

As the light climbs higher on his face, his lips draw her gaze. Full and sensual they are, but stretched into a hard, grim line, warring with his gentle features. He says nothing, he merely leads the party to a large, elaborate banquet room filled with breakfast nourishment - Eggs Benedict, croissant, orange juice. At once she realizes she's starving. The aromas caress her palette, making her mouth dry with anticipation, whet with hunger.

She crosses the room, not waiting for any of the others to follow. As she traverses the length of it, she is instantly struck by the similarities the room shares with the plane. It feeds the senses with an orgy of treats, every surface covered with rich food, swathed in luminescent color. Tapestries drape the walls, satin covered chairs provide rest and moire curtains conceal the windows, waltzing shyly with the occasional draft. The room is overwhelming in its size and opulence.

"Oh, how grand," she gushes, spinning in the center of the room, trying to take it all in with one glance. "How spectacular!" She faces Greg at the end of her pivot, aiming the statement at him. The excitement flushes her face.

"Yes," he says quietly. *Strange. How can the beauty of it all escape him?*

"You don't find it amazing?" She asks.

"Yes, I do." His answer held an odd tone, a secret within its depths. She gives him a queer look and walks away disappointed.

In the garden of her sorrow, she smiles in memory of the room and her first impression of it, knowing it is all immaterial now. That last real day, the final innocence.

"Do you think they're waiting?" she asks, realizing they will be. Greg spares her nothing, yet slows his pace a little, and turns to her.

"They are already there. Preparing."

"Have you seen it before. This disposal?" She's afraid to ask the question, but is more afraid to face the truth unprepared. She holds her breath, awaiting the answer.

Greg merely nods, hangs his head. Shame claims his face and she raises hers toward the center of the garden, where many have gathered. She briefly looks back to him and decides not to ask what burns in her mind: Will they transform her then, and allow the sun to dispose of her?

The garden has changed its look for her. Once it had been her harbor, her haven. She thinks back again to that first night. Her last night.

The sun has settled behind the horizon for barely an hour when the recruits are brought back to the chamber. This time, it is not vacant. It is teeming with life. Hundreds of well-dressed men and women roam languidly through the expanse of it, stopping now and then to mingle or reach for a glass of wine.

The glasses are all filled with red wine, and she thinks it odd at first, but nods silently to the pale servants as they pass. It is so intoxicating, so new. And she doesn't think it strange that she is never offered a drink, never passed an hors d'oeuvre.

Soon she sees her recruiter heading toward her, his waxen face preoccupied with an emotion she can't discern. On his heels follows a short, spare man. Wiry, he looks, with a grotesque appeal. His yellowed face is a sharp contrast to the recruiter's, and the teeth which show through the horrific grimace on his lips are rotted, jaundiced compared to the skin which surrounds them.

They draw close to her. She can feel the recruiter's breath on her face. The other man's manner repels her; he is too close, too intimately near. The breath which assails her nostrils smells of decay and death, as if the food in his belly has not yet digested, instead stagnating in a pool of bile. Images of death steal her mind, and in horror, she moves closer to the familiar point of the room. But her recruiter has moved away and the dread descends upon her again, clamping her soul in a squeezing, claustrophic vice. She senses the man as rancid at the core. She backs away instinctively, alarmed when he takes a step closer.

"Enjoying yourself?" The breath is worse with his speech, a foul blast that rocks her to her heels.

She's not sure what to answer. "That's my affair." By now he has shuffled even closer, grasping her shoulder with his long, bony fingers. Talons of cold, dry flesh. Her heart begins to ache from terror and revulsion and, when the grip tightens, she fears it will burst.

"I'm Veronica," she mumbles stupidly, hoping saying so will alleviate the tension, bring some sort of ordinarity. But instead he sneers, showing his rotted teeth along with his black coated tongue. She shrinks within herself, her shoulders

rounding down pitifully. She hopes frantically he will leave and find another victim to claim.

He doesn't move. Within seconds he pulls her to him, pinioning her against his torso. She gasps for clean, odorless air, but pulls in the smell of mildew decay. The seconds of disgust evolve into utter horror as those grimy teeth clamp down upon the flesh of her naked neck.

Her mind reels with the outrage of the attack,

Her entire soul seeps through the holes in her neck, trickles down her collarbone to a valley of heaving breasts.

but the outrage retreats behind the sharp pain of it. She is barely conscious of the many hands on her body, grappling her limbs, trying to force her to be still beneath the drawing force. She rises to her toes, the strength of the suction pulling her higher until her feet leave the floor. She hangs limply just inches above the tiles, dangling from his fangs.

She sees visions - prisms of color and swirlings of light. Greg's jeering face, disembodied in a pool of blood, intrudes on her mind, as does her recruiter perched atop a fence post like a black raven waiting for scavenge. With visions comes humiliation, utter desolation and degradation.

Her entire soul seeps through the holes in her neck, trickles down her collarbone to a valley of heaving breasts. Worse still, is being able to see the wide expanse of the room before her and the same abhorrence occurring to every other recruit, witnessing the horror on their faces. Knowing, as she watches, that her face looks the same - a rabbit caught between the serpent's bite, being feasted up- on.

She is sure she will die with no dignity, with no angel to smite the serpent's head. And through it all, stands Greg, solemn black eyes riveted to some spot on a distant wall. No hands hold him, no parasites invade his space. Alone. A sober statue with hands behind his back, military fashion.

A grimace spans her face as she recalls it all. For an instant, her mind pauses in it's recollections, doesn't want to continue. The horror of the experience is fresh again. She shivers involuntarily and the cool air of the dawn brings pimples to her flesh. Greg hugs her close just for an instant. The warmth of his skin feels good. She recalls after that initiation she and the others were brought to a cellar, chained for a time, then forced to perform menial labors. Brought above floor to serve at other initiation rites, and fed upon again when they were recovered.

"Are you remembering?" he asks, the timbre of his voice securing her to reality.

She nods, and he sighs, "It's often like this. Many block it out. Until the end."

She wonders how he can do this, time and time again. Bring out the trash for disposal when they become useless. Like rancid meat, or spoiled milk.

"It was the only way I could survive," she whispers, and sees him nod, "I used to hate you for doing nothing. Never fighting for us, for yourself. But I soon copied you." The admission hurt, that she had grown catatonic during the first months, allowing rage and shame to hold her tongue captive. And that later, when she had become herself again, had remained silent from protest.

"It's OK," he concedes, and she realizes he has never judged her. It makes it a little easier to allow him to pull her to the center of the circle. To the gathering of fiends who will take her life. Transform it into something menacing; something unnatural.

She kneels supplicant upon the soft cushion of camomile and waits fearfully for the inevitable teeth on her neck, the cold weight of pinioning hands. Despite her earlier relief she is petrified; she closes her eyes, not wanting to be a coward, but not able to face the reality with her eyes open. She chants to herself, a nearly inaudible mantra meant to founder her as she waits. Her mind drifts again, this time unbidden.

She is in the initiation room again, serving the fiends during one of her recuperation periods; offering elegant flutes of blood while they perform their rites. A voice sounds next to her, startling her and making the glasses tinkle.

"Veronica." The recruiter's voice. It startles her that he should remember her name; she hasn't heard her name in months. She refuses to speak, and he seems to recognize the foundation of her belligerence. To speak is to admit her own humanity, her own frailties. And she doesn't want to remember that she had been human, done human things. Not this beast of burden she had become. She refuses to respond, but nods her head quietly in acknowledgment of his concession.

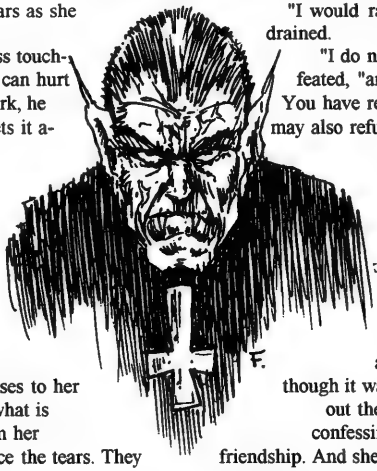
"Come with me," he whispers close to her ear, "outside." His breath is strangely fragrant, not fetid like so many of the fiends, "No one will miss you."

She doesn't want to follow, doesn't want to suffer such an intimacy, but she wants less to witness the spectacle which is about to unfold. So she speaks, and her voice is harsh from so little use, "The glasses will get chilled outside. No one will approve."

He chuckles, a mirthless sound. "They are anyway," he says, his voice indicating her naivete,

"Only the perverse of us prefer it so."

"And those who are not prefer it straight from the beating heart of an innocent." Hatred sounds in every word, burning her own ears as she speaks, and outrage fuels it.



He doesn't respond. A sadness touches his eyes; surprising, that she can hurt him. Instead of a scathing remark, he takes the tray from her hand, sets it adroitly on a nearby table and pulls her through the large french doors to the garden.

The chilly night is crisp and refreshing, filled with sounds of crickets. The weight of being in the open, beneath nature's sky, overwhelms her. She falls heavily to the ground, atop a clump of tender grass. Her face collapses to her hands and before she realizes what is happening, the pain bleeds from her eyes. It takes little effort to force the tears. They simply come of their own accord.

"It is a great burden, I know." She hears him sigh, feels his cold hand on her shoulder as it shakes. No life in it, that hand, just an object with weight. The rage burns within her; the desperation fights for its freedom.

"What do you know of it?!" Spittle flies from her mouth. She wants to punish him with her anger. To flail madly, and hurt him. "You keep us like cattle. Milk us for blood. Bound like beasts, when it you who are the animals. The fiends." Her speech swells with all the anger inside her and she throws it at him like a weapon. But her voice cracks toward the end of it, the intensity of the emotions overwhelming her.

"And what do you know of my hell?" he asks quietly, eyes black in the darkness, "Having to live on this island, away from civilization because of how I must take my nourishment. I am captive as well. Only my captivity will last an eternity."

He paces frantically, crushing the turf viciously. Veronica can see his pain, his anguish, but the heart of it escapes her.

"We try to respect your race, only feeding from those who volunteer, as you have done." He looks truly frightening, but she is unafraid. Her anger strengthens her.

"Volunteers? You call this volunteering?" She holds up the wrists which burn from chains and ropes, blood-red welts of raw skin. Pushes them into his face, rubbing them against his lips, "Taste it then, this volunteering. See if you can feel the pain in it."

But he twists away, unable to face her rage. "But you agreed to come. And that is our rationalization. We must have nourishment, and so you live rather than die. Is that not at least a compromise?"

"I would rather die." She turns away, drained.

"I do not offer much," he says, defeated, "an explanation. A friendship. You have refused my explanation. You may also refuse the latter." he shows her his back, begins to walk away. And as she feels the teeth upon her neck in the garden, among the flowers, the images come, as she knows they will. Disembodied thoughts transform into pictures. Emotions course through her body. She had accepted his friendship, odd though it was. Growing closer throughout the months, arguing, debating, confessing. It had cleansed her, that friendship. And she realizes now, as her soul is drained from her blood, that she had never witnessed him dining.

She feels lightheaded, her chant growing quieter as her strength recedes; she knows she has become a limp carcass. Her body will no longer obey her mind, though the mind is still strong. The memories continue to feed her. Memories of him - the recruiter. And how they had split. And of a dimly lit parlor, the candles, the smell of scorched wax.

"It's your turn," he tries to explain, rationalizing in his annoying manner. She thinks he must have been a bad human.

"My turn! How callous! How unbelievably cruel that you could do this to us. You can't possibly think I'll agree." She hasn't been feasted on in many months, and her strength has grown immeasurably. She has never wondered why she has been neglected. Simply thanked God she has been forgotten.

"A mate has already been selected. And you can't possibly think we kidnap all our nourishment." He sighs heavily, a parent wearily explaining nature's whys and how comes.

"There's that word again!" she screams, irrationality stalking her sanity, "Why do you refuse to call us what we are? Why always nourishment?"

In response he grips her wrists tightly. "Because nourishment is what you are. Why do you always refer to us as fiends. Why never by our names; my name?" His eyes look moist, even in the dark, but she feels no pity for him. He is a fiend, like the others. And she has just now discovered it.

She laughs instead, enraged, thinking the reason must be obvious, "The two are not the same."

"No," he agrees, "but think back. Why would you not speak after your initiation? Was it your fear of acknowledging yourself, of admitting to something that you are. That something threatens what you are?" He sits wearily on a plumply cushioned chair, driving dust from it into the air, "your kind is nourishment to us. It can be nothing else."

She doesn't see, doesn't want to. It's all too far off the point anyway.

"I won't do it."

"You have no choice. You will be brought to a private room in the morning and left there. With him. I can tell you from experience, the new male recruits are not so belligerent. He'll not need your permission."

One child in that manner, she thinks as the image begins to fade, as her death comes upon her; lost, dead, alive. She doesn't know, barely has the strength now, to wonder. And as her last bit of humanity is drained from her, she ceases to be frightened. *Strangely ambivalent state*, she thinks, not unlike her early days as beast to the fiends.

It is a relief instead, and she tries to open her eyes, wants to see Greg again. Her mentor. Her silent companion. She welcomes the darkness which descends, embraces it with whatever soul she has left.

The crimson light of the awakening sun touches the horizon, hurting her half-opened eyes. Red, *blood* red. It bleeds around the orb, filling her lids and spilling from the tear ducts. But it is not the sun which fills her eyes, it is their rite of conversion. A crimson droplet of demon blood baptizing each eye. And then they are gone.

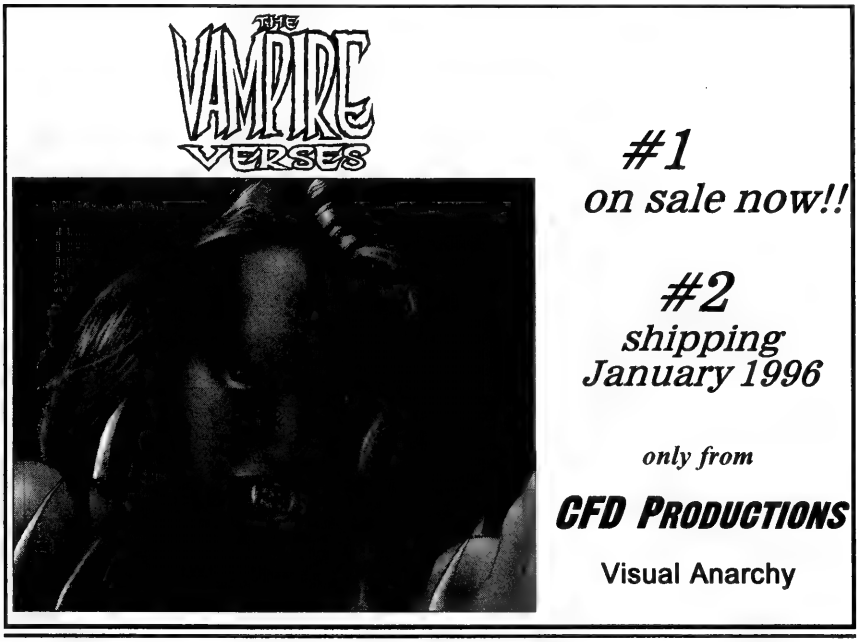
The early morning sun yawns and stretches against the canvas of sky, blinding her, burning her. As her self-loathing does. But with the searing, she feels hands on her hot skin. Flesh as feverish as her own.

Through blurred vision, she sees two images. Human is one, fiend is the other. His blond hair smoking, blue eyes boiling within their sockets. He barely makes a sound as his flesh crackles with consumption.

She hears gravel, and sounds of digging. Furtive movements of hand and earth. Unceremoniously flung into a shallow pit; covered over with debris and cool, refreshing dirt. She's helpless; her own consumption having begun.

And in the dark, amid the smells of mold and earth, she knows he's dead. Or at least his state of death. And she wonders in the brief moments before she slips into her day-sleep; did he save her because of some semblance of humanity she had touched him with, that he had remembered? Or to show her own inhumanity, her inability to empathize with his situation?

Whatever his reason, she is one like him now. And she will have an eternity to contemplate the question, should she choose to continue.



The Classifieds

SUBMISSIONS

ARTISTS: Publishing company seeks erotic, yet tasteful illustrations for new project. Send samples/inquiries, name, address & ph. number to: BKB1, c/o LACUNAE, 32 Tallow Wood Dr., Clifton Park, NY 12065

WRITERS/ARTISTS: Dark Muse is looking for innovative art, fiction & articles in the horror genre. Pays in copies. Send submissions to: Dark Muse Productions, c/o Daniel Burr, 8524 Hwy. 6N, #323, Houston, TX 77095

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YOUR AD HERE

Post here for pennies a day. See below for information.

The Job Market OPENINGS

NOTE: The Jobs Market: OPENINGS is a service to LACUNAE readers. LACUNAE suggests when applying or making submissions, to always include: cover letter listing name, address and phone no., name and phone no. on each page of submission, and an SASE for return of submission and reply. It is wise to read a few issues of any publication before making submissions to familiarize yourself with a particular company's guidelines. While LACUNAE makes every effort to offer valid listings, LACUNAE does not guarantee validity of companies or guidelines within. Publishing companies may list openings free by sending specifications by mail or e-mail. Unless otherwise specified, listings will run one issue.

ARTISTS/CREATORS: Dramenon Studios - now looking for other products & artists. Submissions: Box 77086, Baton Rouge, LA 70879

ARTIST: Silver Shadow Productions - various art submissions, hiring based on merit of work and availability of funds for art purchase. Samples or request more info: 2546 Eaton, Missoula, MT 59801

ARTISTS: Destiny Creations - looking for erotic, tasteful illos. Payment varies. Samples: BKB1, 32 Tallow Wood Dr., Clifton Park, NY 12065

ARTIST: Magic Moments Greeting Cards - freelance artist, assignments on regular basis. Samples: ATTN: Art Dept., 10 Connor Lane, Deer Park, NY 11729 or e-mail art4mm@aol.com

ARTISTS/WRITERS: LACUNAE - fresh, original art, fiction, reviews & poetry. Most genres considered. Pays in copies. Submissions: 32 Tallow Wood Dr., Clifton Park, NY 12065 or e-mail lacunaemag@aol.com

ARTISTS: Kevin Nagel - artists to develop concepts to shop to other publishers, preferably superhero, sci-fi, medival fantasy & horror. Samples: Kevin Nagel, Saturn Comics, 1220 Long Valley Dr. # 1, Palatine, IL. 60067; {708} 394-9429

FOR POSITIONS SOUGHT: For those wanting to offer a service to others, special rates of $5 per issue are available. Includes up to 30 words, with basic description in BOLD. Block ads for featuring art and text are available by the inch {1/2 page wide X 1" high = one each of block} - special: 3 inches - $10 per issue, $25 for three issues. Must be camera ready; $5 setup fee for non-camera ready work. Payment in form of check or MO payable to LACUNAE must accompany ad. Advertisers receive tearsheet.

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THE SAME MARVEL THAT CAN'T DO A MOVIE ON ONE OF THEIR CHARACTERS UNLESS IT'S SHIT FOR T.V., OR ENDS UP "DIRECT TO VIDEO"? THAT MARVEL?!!
WELL, YEAH.
YOU'RE FULLA SHIT!
I AM AIN'T I? I DID USA!! I IGNORED THE DIRECT MARKET FOR YEARS UNTIL I REALIZED I COULD RAPE THE SYSTEM AND MAKE A LOT OF MONEY GIVING FANS INFERIOR CRAP LIKE KAZAR AND MOON KNIGHT!
THERE YOU GO!
THE SAME MARVEL WHO SHAMELESSLY DEVELOPED THE "NEW" G.I. JOE AND YET COULDN'T KEEP BOOKS LIKE STAR WARS AND GODZILLA GOING BECAUSE I CAN'T UNDERSTAND ANYTHING WITHOUT THE WORD "SUPERHERO" IN IT!
THE SAME MARVEL WHO PAID ITS TALENT SUCH A LOUSY ROYALTY THAT THEY RAN OFF AND STARTED THEIR OWN COMIC COMPANY, THE ONE THAT'S NOW CLOSE TO KICKING MY ASS IN SALES!
GODS! I'M SUCH A WASTE!
I'M THE COMPANY SO BLIND THAT WHEN I PUT SHIT BETWEEN PRETTY COVERS I FIND EVERY EXCUSE TO BLAME THE MARKET FOR MY LACK OF SALES AND NOT MYSELF!
...AND THE SAME GUYS WHO ARE TREATING EVERY ASPECT OF "THE MARKET" AS SHITTY AS THE STUFF BETWEEN YOUR COVERS!
GIVE ME A SHOTGUN SPANK OL' BUDDY!
WHY?
I'M GONNA SHOOT MYSELF IN THE BALLS!
YOU MIGHT AS WELL, THE ONLY THING YOU USE YOUR BALLS FOR NOWADAYS IS FUCKING YOUR TALENT, YOUR RETAILERS, AND YOUR FANS!
YARS! THE SHAME OF IT ALL!
MAYBE I'LL BE D.C. THEN!
SORRY CHUM, THEY HAVEN'T GOT ANY BALLS FOR YOU TO SHOOT OFF, AND I HEAR IT'S FROZEN THERE UNTIL '97.
YESH!
HOW ABOUT IMAGE THEN? YESSIR, I'LL BE IMAGE!
AT LEAST THERE I'LL GET, "BONED!"
HAVE A SPRITE PAL!
THE SODA WITH THE ADVERTISING SLOGAN "IMAGE IS NOTHING" SEE, WE AREN'T THE ONLY ONES AROUND COMMENTING ON THE COMICS INDUSTRY!
©1995 LARRY ZIMMERMAN - SEXUALLY FRUSTRATED AS EVER!
DON'T TRY THIS AT HOME FOLKS, IT'S WAY TOO PAINFUL! THIS IS HOW I VENT MY ANGER AND DISGUST. THANK YOU PAM.
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JASON MOORE
1995